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ON EAGLES' WINGS

ON EAGLES' WINGS

BY ARTHUR E. SOUTHON

"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you
on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." Exod. xix. 4

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ON EAGLES' WINGS

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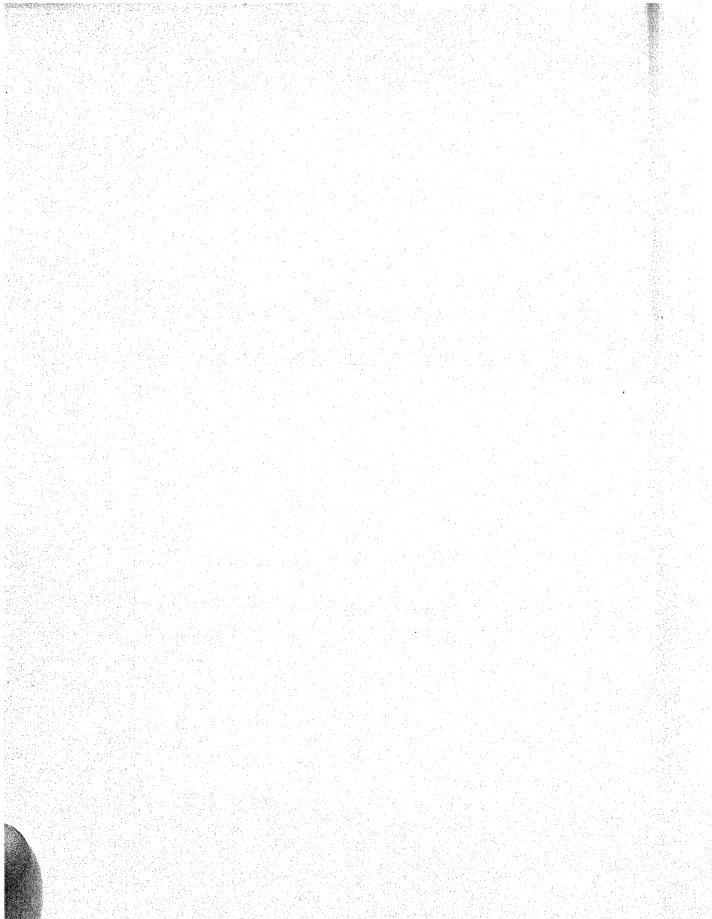
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To
ARTHUR V. BOAND
Dallas, Texas.
Scholar, Preacher, Poet,
and
my dear friend



P R E F A C E

"Every one knows all about Moses and the Israelites, so why write a story about them?"

My answer is that not everybody does know *all* about them. Indeed, familiarity from infancy with the main outlines of one of the greatest dramas in history has had the effect of keeping most people from thinking about the very essence of the drama.

Again, everybody knows Moses repeatedly appeared before Pharaoh and delivered ultimatums. But Pharaoh was a despot, with a shockingly low estimate of the value of human life. Why did he not silence one who to him was a renegade, either by imprisonment or by death? The familiar facts record his furious anger, but not why he exercised such unusual restraint.

Yet again, every one knows that Moses reappeared from Midian after the lapse of many years. The facts are given in the book of Exodus, but no explanation is provided as to how he won the confidence of suspicious slaves.

And, finally, every one knows about the Plagues of Egypt. Generations of believers have accepted these as miracles, but our modern world looks askance at miracles. Is it possible to reconcile the story in Exodus with our new knowledge of the laws of nature?

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These, and many other similar questions, have for a long time exercised my mind; so much so that I simply had to find some sort of answer for them in order to satisfy my own curiosity. In trying to build up in my imagination the drama as it was played out, I discovered for the first time how really great it was. I have written half a dozen novels which were genuine creations of imagination; that is, stories which had no real basis in actual fact. So, too, I have written novels based on historical facts, and have also laboriously collected facts and written straightforward histories of men and movements in Africa. Nothing I have ever imagined and written has given me a tenth of the joy I have found in writing this imaginative reconstruction of one of the most familiar series of incidents in the Bible.

In this book my authority is, first and foremost, the Bible itself. I have read every relevant passage over and over again, weighing literally almost every sentence and finding clues sometimes in a single word. I have supplemented the Bible story with such information from Jewish tradition as seemed to me intrinsically probable. It is from these sources that I have drawn my picture of the physical appearance of Moses, his training as an Egyptian priest, and his military exploits.

For a long time I hesitated over the names of the Pharaohs involved in the drama. Until quite recently it was generally accepted among Bible students that they were Rameses the Great and Merneptah (or Merenptah). Recent discoveries indicate that the Exodus took place two centuries earlier than was supposed, which would make the Pharaohs concerned to be Thothmes III and Amenhetep II,

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in which case the Princess who befriended Moses would have been Hatshepsut, the most powerful and romantic of all Egyptian women.

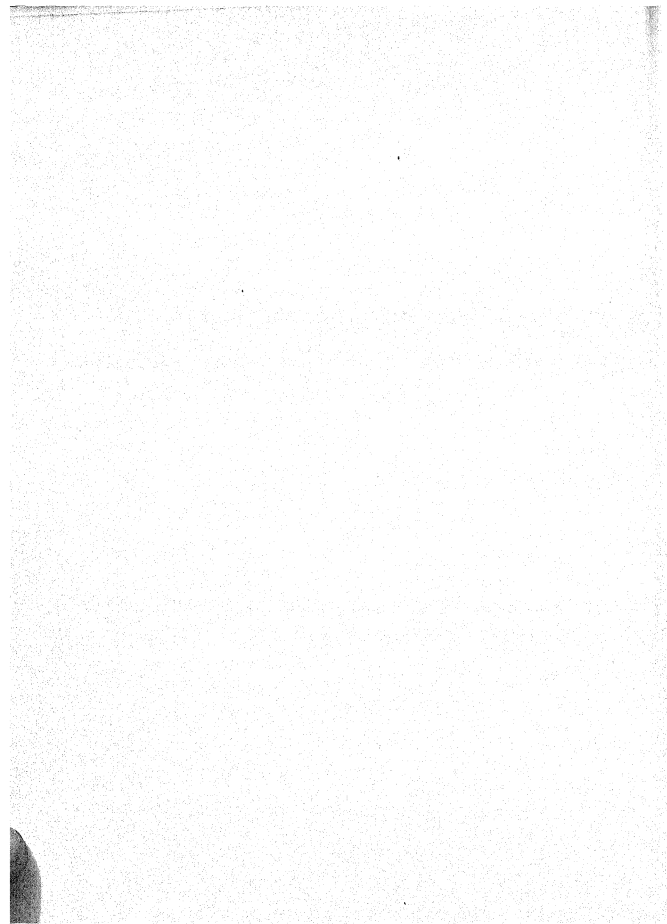
The archaeologists seem to me to have made out a very strong case for the earlier date. I decided, however, to use the more familiar names of Rameses and Merneptah, since many readers of this book will be familiar with those names and might have been puzzled at the introduction of unfamiliar persons. Nor could I ignore the possibility that still further discoveries might upset the new theory and confirm the older.

"Merris" is one of the traditional names given to the Princess who befriended Moses. Because it is easier to pronounce, I have employed that in preference to the rather lispig "Thermuthis" given by Josephus. For the same reason I have used "Merneptah" in preference to "Merenptah."

If my readers will turn again to the first twelve chapters of Exodus, they will find that I have not taken liberties with the Bible. I have sought only to fill in what I believe to be the inevitable background, or to take the facts and offer what I think is a probable explanation for them.

If it helps to make "everybody know *all* about Moses and the Israelites," I shall be more than satisfied.

A. E. S.



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FOREWORD

This thrilling book needs no recommendation to those who will read the first few pages. The interest of the reader is kindled at once, and maintained to the end. Perhaps the most sincere tribute I can pay the book is to say that, though the request to read it in manuscript reached me when the burden of my work was even heavier than usual, and I was rarely able to get to it until after midnight, I found it hard to lay the book down.

I am particularly attracted to the imaginative reconstruction of Biblical narratives. It is a legitimate and valuable service to take all the evidence which the narratives supply, all the light which modern scholarship offers, and all the insight which psychological understanding can give, and by means of an imagination disciplined and restrained by these three factors to set forth the meaningful stories of Scripture in a way which will arrest the mind and captivate the heart.

The difficulty is that so few writers can do this without at some point or other wounding our religious susceptibilities, outraging our sense of propriety, or injuring our sense of artistry. Where many have failed, Dr. Southon has succeeded. He has given us a picture of Moses in the medium of words which is as convincing and appealing as the one in

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the medium of marble wrought by the hand of Michelangelo and now to be seen in Rome.

The reconstructed story is vividly told. Nothing I have ever read describes so effectively the awful conditions of the slavery which the Egyptians imposed on Israel. The character delineations of Moses, Miriam, Aaron, and the rest are, in my opinion, flawless. The story moves with the speed and interest of the best modern novels, and I sincerely hope it will provide us with a film and a play. Both would be of absorbing interest.

I commend this book with enthusiasm. It rescues from the category of "Old Testament Lessons" the epic story of the way in which, through one of the greatest men who ever lived, the purposes of God were carried forward.

Leslie D. Weatherhead, Ph.D, D.D.

The City Temple
London

CHAPTER ONE

THE TERROR IN EGYPT

Paseah, the Lame Man, leaned heavily on his stick as he limped slowly down to the slow-moving river which had brought riches to the Land of Goshen. There was a clump of graceful palm-trees almost on the bank, which had become a favourite meeting-place for the old men of the tribe and for such as he, who could no longer work. It was true that there was not much shade from the burning sun, but a grateful coolness came from the peaceful blue water. With his back against a palm trunk, and his twisted leg supported by one of those mounds of sand which he had invented, Paseah could almost forget the incessant gnawing ache.

Nearly ten years ago men called him Gedar, the Wall. His splendid body had never known a moment's pain, and it had ever been his joy to use those long, rippling muscles in the hardest toil. Then had come the fatal day. Satan himself must have entered into Bukki's gaunt old she-camel. One minute, everything was quiet and peaceful; the next, and the ugly beast was tearing through the untidy rabble of houses, snapping viciously with her great, protruding lips, and lashing out with her big splay feet. Men and women fled from her path with shrieks of terror, but not so Gedar. Glorifying in his splendid strength, he had dared to withstand the rush

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of the maddened camel . . . to come back to life and agony long afterwards.

Many weeks later he made his first venture out of doors, supported by a crutched stick under his arm. Men looked on him with pity, but they could do nothing for him. The Strong Man of the tribe was now useless, dependent upon the labour of his wife for food. Gedar, the Wall, had been overthrown by a maddened camel; henceforth he was known as Paseah, the Lame.

The little Grove of Palms by the river brought him more than shade from the fierce midday sun. All the old men of the tribe used it as their meeting-place, and though Paseah was many years their junior they welcomed him to their company, because of his affliction. Now that he could not work his active mind was compelled to think, and the talk of the old men influenced him powerfully. They had the long memories of those who have no written speech, and they loved to tell again and again the ancient stories of their people.

All his life Paseah had known that though the Beni-Israel lived in the Land of Goshen they were not a tribe of the tall, reddish-brown, slant-eyed Egyptians. He knew that his people had come from far away in the East; from a lovely land which his people always spoke of as the Garden of God. His mother, like all the mothers of Israel, had talked him to sleep as a child with tales of the great heroes of his people. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were more than names to him. They were legendary figures, so great that they were almost divine. They had coloured all his thoughts about God, so that he could never think of God alone. It was always "The

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God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob," and somehow God became real through His association with the Patriarchs of Israel.

What he had known only in general outline he now heard in astonishing detail. The tenacious memories of the old men of the tribe in successive generations treasured every detail, and when telling again the precious stories what one might slur or even momentarily forget another would supply, so that the details were always preserved with the accuracy of the written word. Time stood still in the Grove of Palms; indeed for Paseah time seemed to turn back, and he lived increasingly in the past.

Paseah gloried in the splendid story, his heart swelling with pride at the thought that he was one of the favoured people of God. His ten years of enforced leisure had proved of priceless value to him. He had all the wisdom of the old men, and all their treasured memories. But he was not an old man yet. His mind was still vigorous. He could *think*, as well as dream dreams of past glories.

Now he was finding—what men have ever found—that there is a price to be paid for original thinking. Slowly but surely he was becoming a man apart from his fellows. The men of his own age were now the most influential, forming the Councils of Chiefs in every town and village. Paseah talked with many, only to find himself quite out of touch with them. Without exception, they were satisfied with things as they were. Prosperity abounded, and they were quite sure it would continue.

Paseah did not agree with this comfortable view. Seeking out the chiefs who had been his personal friends in the days

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of his vigorous manhood, he told them of fears induced by what he had seen. Goshen had been merely marshland when the Pharaoh who was Joseph's friend had given permission to the Beni-Israel to settle there. It was even then the centre of Egypt's cattle industry, but those who reared the king's cattle were aliens and slaves, for the proud Egyptians despised shepherds and cowherds. So long as the Beni-Israel had been comparatively few in number, the Egyptians had continued to be indifferent to Goshen. But one consequence of the rapidly increasing population of Joseph's descendants was the necessity to supplement cattle-rearing by agriculture. Corn and fresh vegetables had to be raised locally, and through necessity many of the Beni-Israel became agriculturists. Large areas of the lush marshlands were drained and then tilled, producing the abundant harvests of land which has not been overworked.

Those broad fields of yellow corn had not been unnoticed by the Egyptians. Reports of Goshen's new wealth were made to the Pharaoh who now ruled the land, and Paseah had heard rumours that mighty Pharaoh himself was coming to Goshen. Paseah was sure that such a visit could have only one result: heavy taxes would be levied upon the prosperous Beni-Israel. Instead of being an almost independent people living on the eastern border of Egypt, isolated and with no closer contacts than those resulting from selling their cattle to a small number of official buyers, the Beni-Israel would soon be absorbed into the national life of Egypt. Paseah was intelligent enough to foresee the coming of a host of Egyptian officials, and the swift passing of the old days of prosperous independence.

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All his warnings were disregarded, even by his closest friends. They mocked at his fears and put them down to a mind diseased by a suffering body. Nor were the old men of much help to the troubled Paseah. They readily agreed that things were going wrongly . . . and immediately began to talk of the fine days when they were young.

As he made his way down to the Grove of Palms on this particular day, Paseah had a queer sense of foreboding that the evil which he dreaded was about to come upon his people. He could not account for his depression. The one definite thing he could think of was a look he had seen upon the faces of some Egyptian cattle-buyers the day before. They had not noticed him as he sat in the shade of a broken wall, but he had seen their faces quite clearly and had been vaguely alarmed at what he saw. It is not always easy to interpret a look, when no word is spoken. Paseah thought he had seen anger, even hate, looking out of their slanting eyes which were turned upon a group of children playing in the sun. If he was right, what did it mean? Why should grown men fear little children? He could not understand it, but was filled with disquiet.

The old men greeted him cordially as he sat down and slowly scooped up the sand cradle for his aching leg. He responded civilly, but lapsed into silence when the salutations ended. His brooding was interrupted a little later by the cackling voices of the old men as they greeted a fresh arrival, and he looked up to see a man he had known all his life, and thoroughly disliked. Havilah was a cunning dealer in cattle who was considered to be one of the wealthiest chiefs of the Beni-Israel. In the days of his strength Paseah

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had clashed many times with Havilah, and had always suspected that the unscrupulous trader secretly rejoiced in his affliction. At the moment Havilah's lean, hawklike face wore a satisfied grin, and that he was pleased with himself was shown by the way he received the greetings of the old men and sat down to gossip with them.

"These Egyptians are fools," he said with a chuckle.

"What have you been doing now?" growled Paseah, all his gloomy forebodings and fears leading him to seek one on whom to put the blame for whatever trouble was brewing.

"They despise us as raisers of cattle, but they buy what we sell them," replied Havilah, too satisfied with himself to heed the roughness of Paseah's voice. "I had thirty cows which ate some poison weeds, and any one who knew cattle would have known that they were sick. But these Egyptians are too proud to understand cattle . . . and so they bought them all when I mixed them up with others. They paid me for them in gold . . . and now they have thirty dead cows and I have their gold!"

"It is you who are the fool, not the Egyptians," cried Paseah. "This is not the first time you have spoiled the Egyptians, Havilah, and it is folly. You grow rich by your cunning, but you sow the seeds of hate in their hearts, and one day we shall reap the harvest. You forget that we live in the Land of Goshen only by permission. What Egypt has given, Egypt can take away."

"Pharaoh would never take away from us the Land of Goshen," said one of the old men shrilly. "It was given to our father Joseph for his great service in Egypt."

"This Pharaoh never knew Joseph," retorted Paseah. "It

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is the way of men to forget swiftly the good which men do; it is only for evil that their memories are long. Besides, this Pharaoh is not the descendant of Joseph's friend, nor of the same blood. This Pharaoh is of the blood of ancient Egypt, and men of his race have always hated strangers."

"What could he do to us?" demanded Havilah. "Look over the plain and see if you can count the cooking-fires of the Beni-Israel? We are not a few men, but a strong nation today, and though the Egyptians may hate us they fear us even more."

"And out of that fear will come our ruin," muttered Paseah. "Fear is a madness of the soul, and when men fear they fight without pity. The day is near when Pharaoh will crush us beneath his heel, and what good will your riches do you then, Havilah?"

"Pharaoh will never crush us," said another old man stubbornly. "You forget the promise made to Abraham and Isaac and to Jacob. Their God will be our strength and our defence against the Egyptians."

Because the words were comforting, and what they wanted to believe, the group of old men became voluble in agreement. Havilah's thin, cruel face held a mocking smile. Paseah saw it, and read aright the thoughts of the cunning trader. His face flushed as a surge of bitter anger swept through him. It passed, for even as he was about to break into hot speech all the fears and forebodings of the past came back.

He had just said that fear is a madness of the soul. Sometimes it is also a stimulus to the mind, and so it was now to Paseah. Hitherto everything had been vague. Now he saw



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clearly. When the jubilant chorus died away, he began to speak, and now there was a note of quiet authority in his voice which compelled attention.

"It is true that we are many in the land. Because of that great increase Egypt must needs take thought of the Beni-Israel. There are so many of us today that the Land of Goshen cannot support any more. If we continue to increase where shall we find food for so many? Hunger will drive our people to seek new lands, and where will they go? There is desert land to the east, but the rich fields of the Nile are near. If our people seek a home among those fertile fields will the Egyptians give up their land? You, Havilah, and many others have boasted of your cleverness in trading with the Egyptians. They have bought your cattle, and evil men like you have grown rich by crafty dealings. Will the Egyptians forget your cheating when the Beni-Israel are forced to buy food or seek land from them? In their pride they despised our fathers because they were shepherds and understood the ways of goats and camels and horses. To that ancient contempt you have added hatred, the bitterness of men who feel they have been robbed. Because men like you have coveted the gold of Egypt all the Beni-Israel will one day pay in bitter anguish . . . and I think that day comes soon."

"Paseah the Lame would seem to be a seer of things to come," sneered Havilah. "Have you made friends with the priests of Egypt, so that they have shown you their mysteries? Pah! Your mind is as twisted as your leg. You are like one who cries out in fear as he sleeps, seeing dreadful things, but when he awakes, lo! it was only a dream. What can Egypt do now that we are a great people?"

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Without waiting for further words Havilah rose to his feet and walked away in anger. His wrath was shared by the old men, whose fears had been roused by Paseah's earnest words, and they also drew apart from him. He sat alone, more troubled by his own words than any who had listened to him. Speech had not eased his mind: it had only confirmed his feeling that disaster was imminent.

The Children of Israel! As he thought of the familiar term other things became plain to him in this hour of clear thinking. They were all the descendants of Jacob, that man who was really two men in one. Jacob the Cunning, who had lied and tricked to rob his own brother Esau. Jacob the Lover, who himself had been outwitted and tricked by Laban. Jacob the Fearful, terrified of Esau's anger, and in his fear offering as a gift the fruits of years of labour. Jacob the Aged, who through much sorrow had learned the folly of deceit and had risen to a new life of truthful speaking and honest dealing, until men spoke of him as a Prince of God.

Truly a strange man, thought Paseah, and he had passed on to his children's children that double nature. Paseah thought of many he knew; men like Havilah. They not only lied and cheated in their dealings with the Egyptians but also among themselves. How often he had listened with anger in his heart to one or another boasting of a deal which had made him richer in money or land or women. They would do anything for money, even taking the sacred name of God on their false lips in oaths which were lies.

A twinge of pain in his twisted leg caused him to move a little and rebuild the mound of sand beneath it by which alone he could find a measure of comfort. Once more settled

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in comfort his thoughts took a fresh turn . . . that he was always conscious of that shrivelled leg! Its weakness and aching for ever called attention to it. Very rarely did he think about that other sound leg, or of his still strong arms, or any other part of his body. It was the part of him which was wrong of which he was always aware.

It came to Paseah that so it was with his people. He was always thinking about Havilah and men like him, hating their ways and fearing the consequences of them. And they were just like his own bad leg; only a part, and really a small part, of the Beni-Israel. For one crafty, deceitful Havilah he could think of a dozen other men who were truthful and honest. The sons of Israel, the Prince of God, were far more than the sons of Jacob the Cunning. Paseah thought with generous warmth of the unfailing kindness with which he had been treated through the long years of his affliction; of the respect shown to age, and the universal desire to give pleasure to children, and knew that in these things he could read the truth about his people. They were industrious, clean-living, kindly folk who ever had God at the back of their thoughts. Truly, it was a great thing to be born one of the Beni-Israel; a son of Israel, heir to the promises of God!

Paseah felt a lightening of his spirits at the inspiring thought. Things could not be so bad as he had feared. It was this sitting about so much, and brooding. If he could only do a man's work in the world again surely he would get rid of all these disturbing thoughts and live as lightly and happily as all his friends.

This cheerful mood did not last very long. If the Egyp-

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tians knew his people as he knew them, then all would be well. But they did not know the real Beni-Israel. Only a few hundred of them ever came into the Land of Goshen to trade. It was these who came into touch with Havilah and those who thought it clever to cheat, and it was the tales of deceit which were taken back to Egypt. No wonder he had noticed the looks of hate and fear upon the faces of those Egyptian traders who had bought Havilah's sick cows. They would go back with one more story of the lies and shameless dealing of the Beni-Israel, and before long all Egypt would be filled with the same hatred. One bad man would do more to spoil race-relations in a single day than ten good men could right in a whole year.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of shouting in the distance. Struggling to his feet, he looked across the vast plain towards distant Egypt. A thin pall of dust hanging on the hot, still air told of a moving host, and he could see the light glinting on burnished headpieces and naked swords. Chariots and horses meant a high official, and Paseah wondered who he could be. An icy hand seemed to be slowly tightening round his heart. He *knew* that his premonitions were correct. Trouble, big trouble, was driving remorselessly into Goshen. The days of peace and prosperity were ended. Havilah would soon discover what mighty Egypt could do with even so big a tribe as the Beni-Israel.

Hampered in its movements by the ever-increasing crowd, the procession moved towards him very slowly. Above the heads of the people Paseah could see the tossing heads of horses, and the burnished metal in the breastplates and the elaborate head-dresses of the charioteers. Then, as the pro-

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cession came nearer to him he could at last distinguish the cry which rose from thousands of throats:

"Pharaoh! Pharaoh!"

Paseah's big hands gripped the rough bark of the palm-tree convulsively. For once, rumour had not lied. Rameses, the mighty king of Egypt, had come in person. To the troubled Paseah there could only be one reason for this state entry into the Land of Goshen. Rameses had inherited from his father a craze for building palaces and gigantic statues, and though there was abundance of slave-labour, the cost of building materials was terribly high. In addition, Rameses had been at war for years with the Hittites of Canaan, and the vast expenditure of costly building and war was more than even Egypt's treasury could meet. Pharaoh had come to Goshen to raise money from the prosperous Beni-Israel.

The slow-moving procession came quite close to Paseah, and he had his first sight of Rameses. He saw a tall, thin man swaying easily to the movement of his chariot, his head covered with an enormous wig of closely braided hair which made him look almost gigantic. But it was the face which held Paseah's attention, and confirmed his fears. Rameses looked directly at the clump of palm-trees with its lone figure, and Paseah stared into a lean, hawklike face on which were stamped the signs of arrogance and cruelty. Here was a man who would satisfy his every passing whim whatever the cost in suffering might be to others. Paseah searched in vain for the least sign that Pharaoh was interested in his people, or felt any gladness at the enthusiastic welcome given to him by the Beni-Israel. The cold, calculating eyes were roving everywhere as though to supply the cunning

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mind behind with information to be used later in grinding out the last possible coin for his empty treasury.

If he could have followed the king and listened to his talk later that night, Paseah would have known beyond doubt that his judgment had been sound. A small army of slaves had swiftly erected a tent near the river, and after a bath and an elaborate meal Pharaoh sat and talked with Sisoy, the Overlord of Goshen. His voice had the cold, hard ring of one whose heart knew little of kindness as he spoke of the Beni-Israel.

"These Children of Israel have made Goshen a rich and fair land, Sisoy. They have learned too well from Egypt how to till the land, and they are no longer shepherds or breeders of horses. I have seen that they are rich: now it is for you as Overlord of Goshen to take their wealth and pay it into my treasury. But that is only a small thing. What matters most is that there are too many of them. They dwell here between Egypt and Canaan, where live my enemies. That is the land from which they came, and it may be that one day they will join with the Hittites in war against Egypt and overwhelm us. For the safety of Egypt these aliens must be crushed."

"What is your will for them, O Pharaoh?" asked Sisoy.

"They have multiplied so greatly because they have lived in comfort, with abundance of food," said Rameses thoughtfully. "That is easily altered. See to it, Sisoy, that life becomes hard for them! Much work and little food will soon reduce their numbers."

"What work shall I give them?" asked Sisoy hesitantly, fearing the easily roused anger of the king.

Rameses sat with his chin on his cupped hand, staring

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silently in the direction of Canaan. Though his soldiers were still engaged in conflict with the Hittites, Rameses had no love for war. The Egyptians were not a warlike people, filled with the lust for conquest and ever dreaming of great possessions. They were an industrious nation, skilled not only in tilling the land but also in all kinds of arts and crafts. They knew how to make glass, and to colour it so that their beads looked like precious jewels. No other nation in the world could equal them for graceful pottery or painting or the weaving of fine linen.

Paseah had spoken truly when he said that fear is a madness of the soul, causing men to fight without pity. Rameses dreaded war. Beyond Canaan there dwelt the strong nation of Assyria, and it was Pharaoh's nightmare that one day the hosts of Assyria would sweep through Canaan and invade Egypt. That fear had become a hundred times greater this day, as he had driven through Goshen and seen the swarming Children of Israel, whose faces looked so like those of the dreaded Assyrians, with whom they were indeed racially one. To the fear-filled mind of Pharaoh it seemed as clear as the sunlight that if and when the Assyrians came the Children of Israel would join with them. They were the enemy within the gate, and he trembled at the thought of what might happen soon. Fear drove him to remorseless cruelty.

"This you will do, Sisoy," he said at last. "You will make these people work as they have never worked before. Goshen is the gateway to Egypt, and if the Assyrians come it must be through Goshen. I will build a palace here, and great store cities for the grain which the land yields so richly. These Children of Israel shall be the builders, and since it

is not the work they know, the labour will kill the weak."

"They are a free and proud people," muttered Sisoy.

"Henceforth they shall be slaves!" thundered Rameses.

"I will send you soldiers, enough to tame these enemies of Egypt, and with the soldiers I will send men who are skilled in making slaves work until they drop with weariness. Help them in everything they do, and show no weakness in dealing with the Israelites . . . or Goshen will soon have another Overlord."

Rameses slept uneasily that night, his fears tormenting him in his dreams. When he wakened, he was not only irritable but even more determined to crush the Israelites than ever. He spent that day, and all the next week, travelling through the great plain selecting sites for his palace and the store cities.

Wherever he went he was greeted with enthusiasm by the unsuspecting people. Most of the Israelites were passionately grateful to the nation which had given them a home. They had been reared upon tales of the Pharaoh who was Joseph's friend, and in the coming of Rameses to Goshen they saw nothing to cause alarm. Innocent of any evil intent, a royal visit was a welcome break in the monotony of their days.

Havilah and those like him, who had traded deceitfully with the Egyptians, did not share the general rejoicings. Paseah's oft-repeated warning came back to them, and in the unsmiling face of the king they read the warning that all was not well. They had made many enemies through their greed for gold, and were uneasy. When they heard that Rameses was going to build on a big scale their uneasiness increased.

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Paseah had talked of heavy taxes. It seemed that the Lame Man was indeed a seer!

Pharaoh went back to Egypt, and for a few days life settled down to its ordinary course among the Israelites. But only for a few days. Then came the soldiers, and the beginning of the Terror. Five hundred chariots swept into Goshen, and by their furious driving it was clear that they did not come in peace. Company after company of footmen followed, heavily armed with bows, throwing-sticks, and short swords, and settled in all the towns upon the vast plain. They chose the best houses, and roughly ordered the owners to make room for them.

Then the Elders of Israel were summoned to appear before Sisoy, the Egyptian Overlord, and ordered to pay into the king's treasury so great a sum that they cried out in horror. No heed was given to their protests, and the soldiers went from house to house seizing the goods of every one. Floors were dug up within the houses in the quest for buried gold, and Havilah nearly died of grief when he saw the proceeds of many crafty deals vanish from his sight.

Other men had followed the soldiers, and in their bewilderment at the sudden ending of the old peaceful life few among the Israelites paid any attention to the plainly dressed civilians who passed their days measuring the land where Rameses had decided to build. Paseah was one of the few, and he had abundant leisure to study them. One of the places where they worked was close to his favourite clump of palms, and he overheard enough to know that Pharaoh's new palace was to be erected there. As he watched them at their work of measuring, and drawing plans upon the smooth

sand, Paseah noted some among the Egyptians who did not work. These were big, heavily muscled men with fierce faces, who looked long at the groups of frightened Israelites who gathered near, and Paseah shivered at the naked cruelty shining in their dark eyes. They frightened him far more than the brutal soldiers. He had a strange feeling that these were waiting for their turn to come in the swift tragedy which had come upon the peaceful Israelites.

It came when the architects had finished their plans. Sisoy, the Overlord, appeared and summoned a meeting of all the Elders of Israel, at which he told them that they were to build the palace, and to work without payment. With soldiers surrounding them on every side, the Elders dared not even protest.

Then began the grinding of Israel beneath the heel of Egypt. Bricks in such quantities as no one had ever dreamed had to be made by those unused to the severe labour involved. Women and children, as well as men, were pressed into the work, digging out the clay and mixing it with water, moulding the bricks into shape and carrying them to where they were to be dried in the fierce sun.

And now Paseah's instinctive fear of the men who had stood in idleness by the river was fully justified. With the Overlord's order to begin the building these men appeared, each with a long whip in his hand. They gave the people no chance to organize any opposition. Rushing at the groups of dazed people, they flogged them mercilessly, driving them down to the clay-beds. There they remained all through the long, hot days, their whips cracking ceaselessly, and writhing round the body of man or woman who so much as dared

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to stop to straighten an aching back. Even Paseah in his lameness was not spared. He was given a basket made of reeds, with the old men who had sat so long in contented idleness by the blue waters of the river, and made to carry the heavy clay to those who with unskilled hands tried to mould the bricks.

Days passed into weeks, and weeks dragged along into months, but there was no easing of the savage toil. One after another the old men wilted and died under the inhuman treatment. Paseah's body was covered with weals from many stripes, for with his shrivelled leg he could walk but slowly, and the savage taskmasters declared that he could go quicker if he would. Time after time he fell to the ground, and was cruelly lashed where he lay. He could not sleep at night because of the pain of his tortured body, and grew weaker every day. Finally he could not rise from his mat, and one of the taskmasters who had found special joy in ill-treating the helpless cripple sought him out in his miserable hovel. In its dark interior he worked his last evil on Paseah, flogging the helpless form until it ceased even to quiver beneath the heavy lash. Paseah had found escape from the bondage of Egypt.

Old men and many of the weaker men and women also died. With the rest it was far otherwise. Their muscles soon adapted themselves to the unaccustomed toil and grew ever stronger. In the days of peaceful prosperity they had lived well, and rested through the hot noontide hours. To Ramesses, on his first visit, they had seemed a sleek, well-fed people. A few months later they were altered almost beyond knowledge. Sun and savage toil had sweated every ounce

of fat out of them, and now the suffering children of Israel were a lean and hardy people, physically far tougher than in the days of ease.

When his palace was completed, Rameses came down to take up his residence accompanied by his family and all his palace retinue. As he drove through the land, his face again grew dark with anger. Everywhere he saw the people slaving for him, the taskmasters almost as hard as the slaves themselves. But the sight of so much strenuous effort brought no pleasure to the heart of Pharaoh. There were still too many people! It seemed to him that there were more than on his former visit.

Sisoy the Overlord met him and escorted him to the palace. He hoped for a word of appreciation, for he had carried out the king's orders to the last letter. Instead, Rameses stormed at him in a fury of fear, induced by the sight of those toiling myriads. Sisoy listened in silence, not daring to say a word, lest Pharaoh's wrath should lead him to speak the word which would mean death or imprisonment for him.

"Since work will not reduce them, there is only one thing to be done," said Rameses finally. "Give orders that every child which is born to these Israelites, if it is a boy, shall be thrown into the river for the crocodiles to feed upon. The girls may live, but I will have no more men among these people."

Sisoy gave the order, and though many helpless babies died because of the fear of a tyrant, a mother's wit contrived to give to the world one of its greatest men. The son of a slave was destined to defeat the son of mighty Pharaoh, and change the course of human history.

CHAPTER TWO

A WOMAN'S WIT

Who began the rumour no man knows. Possibly two gossiping priests were overheard as they discussed the latest palace sensation. More probably, a slave-girl whispered it to her lover as they met in secret under the slender date-palms, her eyes shining like the stars which sparkled so brilliantly above them in Egypt's dark night.

Once started, the rumour spread more swiftly than a forest fire. It seemed to be borne upon the faint, cool breeze of the dawn. The blue waters of the big river carried its message on every dancing ripple. It was in the call of the birds and the croaking of the myriads of frogs. Tall, slant-eyed Egyptians gathered in groups and discussed it with fury in their voices and murder in their hearts, their fierce faces turning east to the Land of Goshen.

There, in what had been a land of ease and plenty, but what was now the land of bitter bondage, lean, stringy-muscled slaves forgot for a little while the burden of their woes and toiled with the light of hope in their sun-blackened faces. Ever mindful of the watchful slave-drivers and their terrible whips, they whispered the great message to each other out of the corners of drooping mouths.

Within one day all Egypt knew that Jannes, the most famous of Egypt's priests, had uttered a great prophecy.

Within a week every word he had cried in his harsh, strident voice was graven deep into the hearts of every one, from Pharaoh in his palace down to the meanest slave in his reed hut by the river bank. A child was to be born to a Hebrew slave-woman who would set them free from bondage, and in doing so work terrible evil to the Egyptians!

With such a prophecy, uttered by the man who was the power behind the throne, not one of themselves, what wonder that every heart among the afflicted Beni-Israel was lifted in passionate praise to the God of Abraham and Isaac and Israel? To a people born out of an ancient prophecy, and sustained through all their history on promises of what their God would do for them, there was not the least faint whisper of doubt. That the mouthpiece of God should be an alien priest made the word of prophecy yet more sure, for was not the promise of deliverance to them also a word of doom to those who had treated them so evilly?

Nor did doubt come to ease the troubled minds of their oppressors. Jannes had secured his place and power by methods which silenced criticism. His fame as a worker of wonders was known far beyond the borders of Egypt. Men spoke his name with bated breath and uneasy looks, for there were many who said that Jannes by his magic could read the unspoken thoughts of his enemies. So, because the prophet was Jannes, all Egypt feared its fulfilment.

Most fearful of all was mighty Pharaoh, the despot whose frown meant death to any one of his millions of subjects. Like all who rule by fear he paid the penalty in a fear within himself which never slept. It was fear that the rapidly increasing Beni-Israel, whose ancestors had been given the

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Land of Goshen as a reward for Joseph's skilful handling of the Great Famine, might one day join the Assyrians whose coming he dreaded which had caused him to enslave them. When grinding toil failed to thin their numbers, fear had led him to issue the savage order that every boy born to the slaves should be destroyed.

For a time that cruel command had been obeyed, but never on the scale he planned. It was so unnatural, so devilish in its cruelty, that even the Egyptian women who were the State nurses among the slave-people revolted. For once they dared to defy even Pharaoh, and lied ingeniously when asked to explain the presence of tiny boys playing in the sand, obviously born after the savage edict. Some lingering spark of ordinary human feeling kept Pharaoh from strict enforcement of his own command, and he had not inquired too closely into the operation of his baby-murder campaign.

But the prophecy of Jannes revived his uneasy fears. The peril was immediate and near at hand. It was not a great army beyond the eastern desert, but the birth of a child of destiny within his borders. With the priest Jannes as his evil counsellor he considered the crisis. To avert the threatened doom only one method held the certainty of success. The old, partially enforced edict must be strictly enforced. Every baby boy born to the slaves in Goshen must be destroyed without mercy or exception.

The order was given, and another regiment of soldiers was drafted into Goshen to see that this time it was carried out. The State nurses, who were expected now to become State executioners, were threatened with many things if they failed in their duty. Most of them yielded to personal

fears, but there were others whose hearts were greater than their fears and who risked freedom and even life in giving secret aid to Hebrew mothers.

Pharaoh's soldiers ranged among the miserable huts of the slaves all through the long nights, listening for the thin cries of new-born children. But they were not the only furtive figures of the night. There were others who slipped before them in the darkness, or, when the moon rode high, dodged from shadow to shadow. These soft-footed watchers spied upon Pharaoh's men, and hastened into huts containing the babies Pharaoh feared, and baby-cries were stifled until the lurking peril passed on beyond hearing. So, though many boys were butchered to ease a tyrant's fears, there were others who escaped.

Among these was one whose birth sent a ripple of excitement through the great warren of untidy huts. Amram, the boy's father, had been one of the Elders of the Beni-Israel before the coming of the Terror, and no man was held in higher honour. Robbed of his considerable fortune, turned out of a big, comfortable house, compelled to endless hours of heavy toil in the brick-fields, Amram's spirit was unbroken. Clad only in the breech-clout of a slave, and with his body covered with dried clay, there was still a dignity about Amram which made the vicious slave-drivers curse. Jochebed, his wife, was a worthy mate to so fine a man; one of those "Mothers in Israel" who have inspired poets and sonnet-writers through the years.

No man in Egypt welcomed more eagerly or believed more firmly in the prophecy of the coming Deliverer than Amram. With all his splendid soul he honoured the God of

his fathers, and even in the dark days of the Terror he never wavered in his confidence that God was still within the shadows, keeping watch above His own. Why the Terror was permitted, he neither knew nor asked. His faith was of the fine, simple kind which goes on from day to day, waiting for God's purposes to be made plain. So his soul leaped within him when he heard of the prophecy, and Amram had been the first to suggest the night-watchers who should give warning of Pharaoh's spies.

Neither of his two children, Miriam and Aaron, could be the promised Deliverer, since they were born before the prophecy. As the leader of the night-watchers, he knew the hiding-place of every child who had escaped Pharaoh's death-sentence, and not once but many times he had held each tiny child in his arms and looked long into its eyes, believing that he would be able to see some sign to indicate the coming of the Deliverer.

The months slipped past, and never once had he felt that thrill within his soul which he was convinced would one day come to him when he held within his sinewy arms the Chosen of the Lord. Nor did the long waiting strain his faith. Never doubting the wisdom of God, he found its proof in a second slackening of Pharaoh's campaign of murder. The cruel order was not withdrawn, but there was a perceptible slackening of the hunt. For weeks together the night-watchers roamed the alleys between the slaves' huts and never found a single soldier.

Amram thought much about this easing of the campaign of baby-murder, suspicious of some new move in the attempt to destroy the Beni-Israel. He decided at last that the reason

lay in the arrogant pride of the Egyptians, in their whole-souled contempt for the Hebrews. When time eased Pharaoh's first panic, pride began its work. In calmer moments, the idea of a slave-child delivering the vast horde of slaves out of the hands of mighty Egypt and inflicting injury upon so powerful a nation, became so ludicrous that Pharaoh grew angry with the priest who had made him know the meaning of fear. Vague hints of angry scenes between Pharaoh and Jannes came to Goshen, and convinced Amram that his reasoning was correct. So, as he toiled unceasingly in the brick-fields, Amram sang praises in his heart to the God who used even the pride of His enemies to help His purposes, and looked more eagerly than ever for the child of promise.

Then one night he had a dream so vivid and thrilling that he wakened with a shout which frightened Jochebed. Just as God had come to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in visions of the night and revealed His purposes to them, so God had come to him. Amram never paused to think that his dream might have been inspired by his own intense faith and passionate desire, for to him such a thought would have been almost blasphemy. God Himself had come within that mean little hut and talked with a slave as friend talks with friend, and told Amram that because his heart was clean and he had ever walked before men with truth and honesty, he and no other should be the father of the Deliverer!

With the glory of that splendid vision still about him, Amram told it to Jochebed. Looking into his blazing eyes as she listened Jochebed was convinced. *Her* child would lead the Beni-Israel out of Egypt's bondage, back to the land flowing with milk and honey. That years of galling slavery

must still elapse before the great deliverance mattered little. Even slavery was endurable when hope filled the heart.

Neither Amram nor Jochebed tried to keep their knowledge a secret from their fellow-slaves. It would ease their hard lot, and they knew that no slave would betray the precious secret to an Egyptian. As the months passed, the little hut became increasingly the centre of interest in Goshen. Out of their pitiful poverty the slaves brought daily gifts of food to strengthen the mother of their Deliverer, or did the work which was her lot to save her fatigue.

When the child was born, Amram saw his faith vindicated. No baby he had ever seen looked quite like this tiny son of his. He knew that it was not a parent's fond imagination which assured him that this child was peerless in Egypt. The thrill he had expected came to him with such intensity of emotion that he almost fainted.

His certainty that the prophecy was at last fulfilled was shared by all who came in secret to see the child of promise. In less than three months the tiny face bore a strange look of authority—a regal look which made men catch their breath and involuntarily sink upon their knees in instinctive homage. Compared with the other children of the overworked and undernourished slaves, this child looked like an eagle among sparrows, for the many gifts of the slaves had not been in vain.

The child's size and strength now brought real peril. Its cries were not thin wailings easily stifled when enemies were near. When it cried, it did so with a lusty yell which carried far on the hot, still air. Being a slave, Jochebed could not give her child the constant nursing it needed, and the baby

protested noisily against the conditions in Goshen. Amram roamed the alleys at night like an uneasy spirit, his keen eyes raking the shadows for a sign of one of Pharaoh's spies.

Then came a day when even Amram's fine faith faltered and black despair ate into his heart. Coming home from his work in the brick-fields, he heard in the distance the long, high note of a ram's horn, and saw the dust clouds above a long procession. One of Pharaoh's many splendid palaces was on the river bank, less than a mile from his poor home. Save for a few servants, it had been empty for some time, but Amram knew that this procession meant that it was to be reoccupied, possibly by Pharaoh himself. That meant the presence of a vast army of Egyptian servants and soldiers, many of whom would wander among the slaves' huts during both day and night. One of them would surely hear the cries of his wonderful baby, and the day of its detection and death was imminent.

In the first moments of panic he thought of flight, but abandoned the idea almost immediately. Egypt's organization of her vast numbers of slaves was too perfect. Each slave-driver had his own section, and knew his slaves by name. Amram was too well known for his flight to be kept secret for a single day. Besides, how could he flee with his wife and three small children? To escape from Egypt he must flee to the east, and there was the terrible desert in which death must overtake them all.

Jochebed read his distress upon his expressive face as Amram entered, and when he told her of the coming of the great procession she caught the helpless baby to her breast in an instinctive, pitiful gesture of protection. Then, as Amram

looked at her with misery in his heart, he saw a change come over her face. Instead of giving way to grief, Jochebed's beautiful features hardened with determination. Other mothers in Israel might weakly surrender their children to the murderers of Egypt: she would fight for this child of promise in whom were centred the hopes of her nation.

"Go to the palace and see who comes; if it is Pharaoh himself or another," she ordered.

Amram went, to return later with the news that the one who had come was the Princess Merris, daughter of mighty Pharaoh. That meant there would be fewer soldiers but more women servants than if Pharaoh had come, and rather added to the risk of detection. No woman could fail to recognize the cries of an infant, and if of a kindly heart would most certainly enter an empty hut, while a soldier might have passed indifferently.

Jochebed knew little of the Princess Merris. She knew that Merris was married but childless, and since there is no secrecy in a slave-world she shared the common knowledge that the Princess was unhappy. Jochebed had seen her on former visits to the palace, but always from a distance and surrounded by ladies-in-waiting and many servants. A vague plan was forming in her mind, and before carrying it out she needed a closer view of Pharaoh's daughter.

Amram had formed the watchers of the night to spy upon Pharaoh's soldiers: Jochebed now became a spy upon Pharaoh's daughter, and showed genius in her methods. Within a week she had discovered Merris's daily routine, how almost every hour was occupied. Twice she had been within a few yards of her, and not even her consuming passion to save her

child could prevent a twinge of envy. Her own face was tanned almost black by labour in the fields under Egypt's hot sun, and she wore only the single drab cloth of a slave-woman. Merris was unusually fair, with the regular, perfectly chiselled features of an Egyptian aristocrat. Jochebed was not impressed by the antimony-stained eyelids which made the princess's eyes look unnaturally large and brilliant, nor did she admire the henna-stained hands and feet. But she had to admit that Merris was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen, and she could not wholly banish from her thoughts the beautiful clothes which set off so well that fair beauty.

But the purpose of her spying was not to envy Pharaoh's daughter. The success or failure of the plan she had formed depended upon more than Merris's wealth or beauty. Jochebed was waiting for a single look, or fleeting expression, which would tell her whether or not to proceed further with her scheme to save her baby's life. So she used the knowledge she had gained of Merris's movements, using all her skill to make not only more opportunities of seeing the Princess close at hand, but to make those meetings appear natural to Merris's attendants.

Her patience was rewarded three days later. The Princess was returning to the palace after a visit to the house of the governor of the district, and the road along which she walked passed close to some irrigated fields in which were working many slave-women of Israel. One of these attempted to cross the road, carrying on her head a big basket heavily loaded with produce, and with a tiny girl straddling across one hip. With no reason, save his innate brutality, a

soldier of the Princess's escort ran forward and gave the poor woman a violent push. The heavy basket toppled over, and to save it from falling the woman involuntarily raised both hands to steady it. In doing so she loosed her hold on the child, and it fell heavily to the ground, to lie there screaming with hurt and fright.

Jochebed, who had taken her place among the workers of the field as though one of them, saw it all. The moment the child fell she looked eagerly at the Princess, who was then quite close to her. She saw Merris reach out a hand as though to save the child, her face full of pity as the child screamed. The slave-woman hurriedly picked up her child and slipped into the field, but Jochebed saw with delight that the incident was not ended. Merris sent for the soldier, and though Jochebed could not hear the quietly spoken words of the Princess, she knew from his expression that he was to be punished for his act.

Satisfied at last, Jochebed hurried home and waited impatiently for Amram to return. As soon as he entered, she told him to go to the river and fetch her a big bundle of papyrus-reeds, and then to get some pitch from one of his friends.

"What do you want them for?" he asked in surprise.

"To save my baby," she answered briefly.

"But how?"

"I am going to make a basket with the reeds and cover it with pitch so that no water can get into it," she replied swiftly. "Then I am going to put our baby into it and hide it among the reeds in the pool where the Princess bathes each morning. She will find it there, and will save the child."

"You are mad, Jochebed," cried Amram. "Pharaoh's

daughter will throw the child to the crocodiles, not save it!"

"Listen, my husband," she said patiently. "Only a woman can rightly read the heart of another woman. You think of Princess Merris simply as Pharaoh's daughter: so she is, but she is also a woman. This day I have seen that she is a true woman, with a heart which can feel for a little child, and there lies our only hope for our baby."

Quickly she told him of the slave-woman and Merris's anger with the soldier. Amram listened but was not convinced.

"That was a girl-child," he protested. "The Princess knows Pharaoh's command about boys, and she will have our child destroyed."

"The Princess has all the wealth of Egypt," said Jochebed slowly. "She lives in a palace and has hundreds of servants to run at her lightest word. Pharaoh, if reports speak the truth, idolizes her, and will not gainsay her anything. But with all her wealth and power the Princess is unhappy. I have watched her closely and I know. Egypt's gods have denied her the one thing she craves above everything: she is childless, and her heart is empty and hungry. Most women would choose a boy rather than a girl, and I know that when Merris sees our child her heart will reach out to him, for there is no child like him in all Egypt. I know it, my husband; for I too am a woman, and my heart tells me so."

"You are wrong, Jochebed, and you give our child to death," said Amram stubbornly. "You forget Pharaoh's command, given when he heard the prophecy. When he sees our child—if he ever does—he will surely know then that here is the promised Deliverer, and kill him with his own hands.

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If you want an Egyptian woman to adopt your child, seek any other woman in Egypt than Pharaoh's daughter."

"And men count you wise, Amram!" said Jochebed scornfully. "Surely fear has robbed you of that wisdom which made men so often turn to you for counsel. Merris is the only woman in Egypt who could save our child. No other would dare to defy Pharaoh. When Merris sets her heart upon the child, as she will when once her eyes have seen him, she will never let him go. Pharaoh—when has Pharaoh denied his daughter any desire?"

"It is madness," said Amram.

"It is wisdom," retorted Jochebed. "Where is your faith in the God of Abraham? Did he not tell you that this child should be the Deliverer? Will He not incline the heart of Merris towards the child? By your doubts you dishonour God, Amram, and deny His power. Do you think it is a light thing for a mother to do what I intend? Maybe I shall never see my child again, for Merris may take him far away. These tiny hands have fastened on my heart, and if she takes him away she will tear my heart from my breast. What I do is the hardest thing a woman can do, but I do it because I believe in the God of Abraham and of Isaac and Jacob. Every promise He made to them He also fulfilled, and He will keep the promise He made to you. This child was born to redeem Israel from bondage, Amram, and neither Pharaoh nor all Egypt can destroy the chosen of God."

"You are a worthy daughter of Sarah, mother of the Beni-Israel," said Amram as he looked at her face, beautiful with the light of passionate faith illuminating it. His doubts died away as his faith in the power of God to save His own was

revived within him, and without another word he hurried to the river to cut the needed reeds.

They worked together nearly all through the night at making the basket thoroughly watertight save for the lid, which had to be left loosely plaited so that the child could breathe. Then shortly before dawn, they both hurried down to the river to Merris's bathing-pool. This was protected from crocodiles by a palisade of stout stakes driven firmly into the river bed, and was made private by a dense screen of papyrus-reeds. Jochebed's previous observations of the Princess's movements told her just where to hide the basket among the reeds so that it should not be seen by the first slave or lady-in-waiting to enter the pool. Premature discovery meant the risk that an evil-hearted servant might throw what was obviously a slave-child over the palisade into the river. So Jochebed planned that Merris herself should find the child.

Well fed and comfortable in its cosy cradle, the baby would sleep at least until the Princess came, and then the noise of the laughing, chattering bathers would awaken it. She longed to wait about and see what would happen, but to do so would probably ruin another scheme which she cherished in secret. It needed almost a physical effort to turn and leave the baby in its floating cradle, but Jochebed's resolute will triumphed and she regained her home without any one's having seen her near the pool.

For the next part of her plan she needed the aid of her daughter Miriam, and sighed thankfully as she thought of the girl's abnormal intelligence. Though not ten years old, Miriam's wits had often outmatched those of grown-up people,

and had caused her mother some uneasy thoughts. But in this crisis those sharp wits would be invaluable.

Miriam knew what her mother had planned, and the part she was to play. Her little face was alight with eagerness to begin, and Jochebed had to restrain her from running out too soon. Her orders were that Miriam was to play about in the fields near the pool until the Princess and her party were actually in the water, and only then was she to make her way towards the reed-screened entrance.

As the time approached for the bathing-party, Jochebed left her home and took up a position from which she could see the pool. Almost to the minute Merris appeared and passed out of sight again within the reeds. Jochebed strained her ears for a sound to tell that the child had been discovered, but the distance was too far. A little later she saw the small figure of Miriam approaching the pool.

Inside the pool, things happened almost exactly as Jochebed had desired. The baby slept peacefully until the laughter and splashing of the bathers wakened it, whereupon it set up one of those lusty yells which had made the heart of Amram so often turn cold within him. Merris was quite close to it at the moment, and peering through the reeds she saw the pitch-covered basket. At a word from her, a slave-girl pushed through the reeds and returned with the basket in her arms. When she had placed it before Merris, she lifted the lid, and Merris gasped with amazement. She had known that it was a baby she would look upon, but not such a child as this. Never in all her life had she seen so lovely a child, and her wonder was shared by the Egyptian women with her.

"It is a child of one of the Hebrew slaves," she said, "but what a child! Truly it might be a son of the gods."

Frightened by the strange faces bending over him, the baby began to cry—not the lusty yell of hunger, but the soft whimpering of fear. Instead of distorting its beautiful features, the quiet sobbing added an irresistible pathos which went straight to the heart of the child-hungry Princess. With one swift movement she stooped still lower and picking the baby from its reed basket hugged it to her breast, all the starved emotions of years finding an outlet as she crooned the universal language of mother-love.

The crowd of women round her stared in wondering amazement. This was a transfigured Merris. They had seen her in many moods: imperious, haughty, violently angry when her wishes were not immediately gratified. None of them had ever guessed that she could be so gentle, yet at the same time so fiercely possessive. The touch of the child's soft, warm flesh upon her own had hardened pity into resolution. This child was the incarnation of innocence, helplessness, and beauty, and Merris made her decision in a second. Lifting her shining eyes to the women in waiting, she said decisively:

"This child is mine! I shall adopt him by the laws of Egypt, and one day he may sit upon the throne of Pharaoh. I have drawn him out of the water, and therefore his name shall be Mo-Uses."

Trained to agree with every whim of their imperious mistress, the women praised her for her kindness. But in this instance there was an unusual sincerity in their flattery, for

the strange beauty of little Moses, as he was henceforth to be known, had touched their hearts also.

One, more practical than the rest since she also was a mother, added:

"Babies need feeding, Princess. Would it not be wise to seek a foster-mother to care for the child?"

Merris instantly agreed, and in a few moments the party came hurrying from the pool. Miriam now played her part in the drama of a mother's fight to save her child. Hidden within the reeds, she had overheard all that had been said, and knew that the baby was safe. Now she hastened to follow her instructions with perfect artistry. Withdrawing swiftly from the reeds, she walked slowly towards the entrance, meeting the advancing Princess who still carried the child in her arms. Miriam's little face was the picture of woe, and she had managed to force some real tears which were slowly trickling down her cheeks. Merris saw her grief, and in the mood of tenderness towards all little children which was moving her so deeply, she called Miriam to her.

"Why do you weep, little one? Has any one hurt you? If so, tell me his name and he shall be punished."

"I weep for my mother," said Miriam. "Her baby was taken from her in the night, and with its passing the light went from our poor home."

"A Hebrew woman whose child has died," said Merris, misreading Miriam's cunning phrase. "Truly the gods are smiling upon me this day. Here is the foster-mother I need. Child, run to your mother and tell her to come swiftly to care for this child which I have drawn from the river to be my own."

With a big effort, Miriam hid her elation, and ran off upon her errand. Jochebed had seen the whole thing from a distance and met the girl a few minutes later. When she heard that her plan had succeeded, and that she was to have the care of her own child, she lifted her heart in a passion of praise to the God who had shown her the way to save the child of promise. Then, with Miriam, she hurried to the palace and was brought into the presence of Merris.

The Princess in her costly clothing and the slave-woman in her drab garment made a striking contrast. Merris looked with interest into the dark, handsome face, sensing something of the fineness of the Hebrew woman, and was satisfied that here was the ideal woman to have the daily care of the child who might one day be Pharaoh. Amram and Miriam were given a room within the palace with Jochebed, and save for such times as Merris desired to have the baby with her in her own rooms the family were as united as when together in their miserable hovel in the slaves' quarter. Amram was given a position within the palace as one of Merris's servants, and life became vastly pleasanter for them all.

As the weeks slipped by and the infant Moses grew daily stronger, and his strange beauty increased, the Princess became ever more attached to her adopted son. It was the one interest in life she had needed, and every one in the palace rejoiced in the new atmosphere of happiness. One or two of the older servants wondered secretly what Pharaoh would have to say when he heard that his daughter had defied his word and saved a boy of the Beni-Israel, but they kept their uneasy thoughts to themselves.

When Pharaoh came to visit his daughter, their fears were

set at rest. Pharaoh came expecting to find a spoiled, discontented woman, angry with life because of her thwarted desires. Instead he found a new Merris, a daughter he hardly recognized. Her fair, beautiful face was softened with happiness, and she greeted him with a tenderness to which he had long been a stranger. Inwardly marvelling at the change and wondering as to its cause, Pharaoh accepted it thankfully. It was not until he had rested and been well fed that Merris revealed the secret of her transformation.

When the meal was ended and Pharaoh reclined at ease, Jochebed brought in the baby and laid him in Merris's arms. Pharaoh sat erect, startled beyond words as he watched his daughter's face and saw the look of passionate love she gave to the child, which looked up into her eyes and crowed with delight.

After a few moments' absorption, Merris rose and brought the baby over to him, saying:

"The gods have had pity upon me at last, O my father. I grieved because I had no child of my own and prayed to the gods in secret through many years. My prayers were heard, and lo! the gods sent to me upon the river which is the life of Egypt one who surely must be a child of the gods. Look into his face, for, lo! there is no child like him in all Egypt."

"Yet he looks as though he might be a child of the Hebrews, Merris, for these are not the features of an Egyptian."

"He is a child of the gods," insisted Merris. "He came to me in answer to my prayers, and by the laws of Egypt I have adopted him and now he is mine. Already he is dearer to

me than everything else in life, and no one shall take him from me."

"But what of the prophecy that a child of the Hebrews would one day lead them against us? May not this child be that one, for it is easy to see that this is no ordinary child?"

"This child shall be brought up as an Egyptian and learn all that the priests can teach him. Thus the day will come when he shall become a leader in Egypt and our defender against all enemies."

Pharaoh's fears had already almost gone, his arrogant pride making it difficult for him really to anticipate trouble from a horde of unarmed slaves. Merris's joy was so evident that he was loath to say anything to spoil it. Moreover, much experience had taught him that she usually got her own way in the end when her heart was set on anything. In her present mood she was easier to live with than he had ever known her, and so Pharaoh took the easy way and gave in. It was all the easier to do so because of the child himself. As Merris had said, there was not another child like him in Egypt. Pharaoh loved beautiful things, and had spent vast sums in collecting everything rare and good to look upon. This strange child satisfied the artist in him, and though his soul was stained with the murder of many helpless children, he found a wholly new sensation of pleasure as he held the child within his arms.

Merris's assurance that the child should be trained as an Egyptian eased his mind, and he thought that he held within his arms the one who should succeed him eventually upon the throne.

But that mystic beauty which all his life made men turn

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and look again with wonder upon the face of Moses was not the only unusual thing about him. His soul was as strong as his features were fine. When the day came in which he had to choose between the easy way of life within the palace as son of Pharaoh's daughter, and the hard lot of an outcast with the hand of every man against him, he made the choice which has made his name live for ever, and fulfilled his destiny.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IDOL OF HIS PEOPLE

"Lean more on me, Mother," urged Miriam. "They are coming this way, and you will fall beneath their feet."

The haggard woman's thin arm tightened round Miriam's shoulder, and with a final effort to compel her shaking legs to carry her to safety she stumbled on through the loose sand. Miriam's eyes were fixed upon the broken walls of a deserted hut which stood a little way off. If they could gain its shelter, her mother could lie and rest in safety.

Could they reach it in time? The vast crowd was sweeping towards them with terrifying speed. The hoarse roar of thousands of voices swelled with every second. The two women were directly in the path of the mob, and Miriam's lips tightened as she saw the tossing plumes of horses and shining breastplates of the charioteers. If her mother collapsed now, nothing could save her from being trampled to death. The men whose feet would stamp out her life would never know what they had done, for the mob was drunk with riotous joy.

They could never reach the hut! The old woman's strength had gone, unable to cope with the shifting sand. Despair gave Miriam added strength. Stooping low, she caught her mother's thin form and lifted her bodily on to her shoulder and began to run the last few yards.

For the first time in her life she felt thankful that hers had not been a life of sheltered ease, and that her muscles had been made tough as a man's through exhausting labour in the fields.

She reached the desired haven just as the first of the mob ran by, and dropped panting to the ground. In a few minutes she recovered her breath, and helped the poor old woman to a more comfortable position. Then she rose to the full of her splendid height and looked over the broken wall at the vast mob pouring past their shelter. In the centre of the yelling thousands was a chariot with its rearing, prancing horses skilfully handled by a gigantic negro. Behind him, looking impassively over the heads of the people, was the man whose praises were being shouted to the brazen sky.

Looking at him as he swayed easily to the movements of the chariot, it was easy to understand the almost worshipping looks turned upon him by men as well as women in that vast throng. Truly here was indeed a son of the gods—Moses, Prince of Egypt, who might be heir to great Pharaoh's throne, ruler over millions in the oldest, strongest empire in the world.

He was so tall that not even the comparison of the gigantic charioteer dwarfed him. Chest and back were covered with plates of shining bronze, and on his head was one of the big, elaborate wigs of curled hair for which the nobles of Egypt were famed. His arms, folded across his mighty chest, were bare to the shoulder, and the bulging muscles above the small wrists indicated phenomenal strength.

But magnificent as was his form, it was the face of Moses which caught and held the eye. Pale olive in complexion, it

was in striking contrast to the reddish-brown or almost black faces of those round him. Large, brilliant eyes of richest hazel stared steadily from beneath level brows. A nose thin and high in the bridge gave to his face the look of an eagle, king of the air, scornful of all that crept upon the face of the earth. The strong, firmly rounded chin was hidden by a short, pointed beard, and its strength was shown by the forward thrust of the silky hair which covered it. Only the mouth saved it from being a fierce, ruthless face. The thin, beautifully shaped lips were as tender as a woman's, swift to curve into a smile; though at times they could harden into a thin line, even as the hazel eyes could flash. But not many had seen the face of Moses harden into ruthless determination. Normally it was as now—more than handsome; queerly attractive and compelling. Men, and even more emphatically women, declared with conviction that in all Egypt there was no man to be compared with Moses, son of the Princess Merriis, daughter of Rameses the Great.

Miriam watched him pass with her own fine features contorted. Savage toil in the fields had long since robbed her of her own youthful beauty, for the sun had toughened her skin and seamed it with tiny wrinkles. But she was still a handsome woman, and would be as long as she lived.

"Did you hear them, Mother?" she asked, her lips curling in an ugly sneer. "Ten thousand voices hailing your son as Prince of Egypt, and he passed without a glance at where the mother who bore him lies in pain."

"How could he know, Miriam? You grow bitter with the years, and in your bitterness you wrong him."

"One look into his mirror should tell him that he is no son

of Merris," retorted Miriam. "His face betrays him as one of the Beni-Israel. But Moses has chosen the ease of Pharaoh's palaces and the wealth of Egypt, and despises the Hebrews who are his true brethren."

"Did you see him well, Miriam?" asked Jochebed, a mother's pride making her voice stronger. "Did you ever see such a man? No other than Moses could have driven the hosts of Ethiopia out of Egypt. In her hour of peril Egypt had to call upon my son to save her! And one day he will deliver Israel from Egypt's bondage."

"One day!" sneered Miriam. "Now that he has delivered Egypt he will think less than ever of the slaves of Israel."

"The God of our forefathers revealed to Amram my husband that Moses should deliver us from the hand of Pharaoh, and when the day of deliverance comes Moses will not deny the Lord," said Jochebed firmly.

"God has forgotten us," cried Miriam passionately.

Jochebed did not reply, for this was an old and all too frequent complaint of Miriam's, and she felt too weak and ill to argue. As the last of the crowd had passed beyond the broken walls, she struggled to her feet and with Miriam's aid made her slow way back to the miserable hovel which was their home.

The years had not dealt kindly with Jochebed, and only her faith in the goodness and the wisdom of the God she served so well kept her from the bitterness which was souring her daughter. At first, it seemed as though their lot was to be the easiest of all the suffering Beni-Israel. When her mother's wit had devised the plot to save this child of promise, sent, as she firmly believed to be the Deliverer of Israel,

she and her family had been brought to the palace of Merris. To be acknowledged foster-mother of her own splendid son had seemed almost a miracle, and for nearly four years they had known luxury.

Then in a day jealousy drove them out again to slavery. The Princess Merris had become more and more devoted to her adopted son as he grew in size and his strange beauty unfolded with the passing days. With her thwarted maternal instincts, this child whom she had found upon the river became her very life. She wanted him with her all the time, and took less and less interest in court affairs.

But there were hours, and at times days, when Pharaoh's daughter had to attend her father in the elaborate court functions. Jochebed made the most of those periods, and lavished all her wealth of love upon her little son. All the strange ties of natural affinity were in her favour, and the growing child began to show a marked preference for Jochebed.

It was inevitable, since she was his mother. But that vital fact was unknown to the Princess Merris. To her, Jochebed was simply a Hebrew woman whom she employed as nurse to the child. Nor did she recognize for a considerable time what was taking place. Accustomed all her life to having her own way, and to taking the lead in everything, she assumed as a matter of course that her adopted son would give her the first place in his affections. The discovery that little Moses thought more of his nurse than of her came as a terrific and mortifying shock, all the worse because it was witnessed by Pharaoh himself.

It happened on a day when Pharaoh came to visit his

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daughter. Jochebed had promised the little lad that she would take him down to the river where he loved to play with the damp sand, after the fashion of children of all nations. Merris wanted the child to stay with her in the palace, to show off his beautiful features and engaging ways to her father. There was a stormy scene, in which the child—already spoiled by the two doting women—insisted on having his own way. To get it, he suddenly broke away from them and dashed towards an open window, only to slip on the polished floor, where he lay screaming.

Merris and Jochebed rushed to pick him up. Jochebed, her soul in her eyes, had perforce to surrender the child to Merris. The Princess tried to comfort him, but in vain. He struggled from her arms and ran to Jochebed, clinging to her with the tenacity of fright, and Merris had to stand by helplessly and watch the child's own mother soothe him in a moment.

To Merris, it was a moment of intense humiliation. Her son, as she always thought him, had preferred a despised Hebrew woman. Jochebed was a rival for his affections. It was an intolerable thought—and a situation which could be quickly remedied. That same night Jochebed was sent from the palace, together with Amram and her other two children, Miriam and Aaron.

After four years of ease and comfort in the palace it was terribly hard to go back to the grinding labour of the brick-fields and the cramped quarters of a slave's hut. The slave-driver in charge of the section into which Amram was drafted was a brutal man, and he found a savage joy in persecuting the man who had so suddenly been deposed from

favour. Amram's natural dignity seemed to infuriate him, and he forced him to the most laborious and unpleasant tasks. With muscles softened by good living, Amram was unable to maintain the pace demanded of him, and the slave-driver's whip curled round his shrinking body a dozen times a day, raising great welts which soon became open sores. Now always covered with filth, those open wounds meant disease. Within a month of his expulsion from the palace Amram's body was burning with fever, and his limbs so weak that he could not stand.

The inhuman brute who was responsible for his sufferings went to the hut and dragged him out into the blazing sun. Jochebed tried to intervene, only to share in the savage blows from the heavy whip. To save her from further flogging, Amram called upon his last reserves of strength and staggered off towards the brick-fields. He did not return at sundown, and Jochebed and Miriam sought for him by the light of the moon. They found him at last, huddled in a hole he had dug in the clay-beds. Amram's last work for Egypt had not been to make bricks, but to dig his own grave.

The shock of his death under such circumstances broke Jochebed's spirit. She became quiet and passive, doing what she was ordered mechanically, and seemingly indifferent to abuse or blows. Her apathy saved her from much violence, for even the brute who had killed her husband found no satisfaction in ill-treating one who seemed so utterly indifferent. In the end he let her alone, and later she passed under the care of another taskmaster with more human feelings.

Only one thing stopped her from following Amram to his grave and so finding escape from Egypt's bondage. She clung

to her belief that her son Moses was the child of prophecy, born to deliver her nation. It had become a fixed idea, and with it a conviction that she would not die until she had seen him become a leader in Egypt. So she lived on, growing pitifully thin and haggard, seldom speaking and never smiling. All the life in her body seemed to be concentrated in her dark eyes, which burned and glowed in her shrunken face, and were for ever turning towards the palace which sheltered her son.

The effect upon Miriam of her father's tragic death was very different. She was too young to be broken by her grief. Instead, it hardened her, and within her soul was born a consuming hatred for Egypt and everything Egyptian. She hated the thought of her small brother living in the palace, not because he was enjoying luxury while she knew only privation, but because she felt he was being turned into an Egyptian.

When she heard later that Moses had gone to the School of the Priests in Heliopolis, to be initiated into all the strange mysteries and learn the magic of the most powerful priests in the world, she stormed and raved for days. Pharaoh was not only the head of the State: he was also head of the Church, by right of birth the primate of the priests. Miriam knew what the sending of Moses to Heliopolis meant. He was being trained in the mysteries of the priesthood in preparation for the day when he might succeed Rameses as Pharaoh, to become head of Church and State, and therefore be responsible for the cruel slavery which had killed her father and was slowly killing her mother. Moreover, it made him a renegade from the faith of his fathers. He had abandoned the

worship of the God of Abraham for the worship of Osiris, and all the host of Egypt's gods.

The slow years passed, with Jochebed and Miriam rarely catching more than a distant glimpse of Moses. Through the underground system of the slaves, by means of which much knowledge thought by the Egyptians to be secret became known to the slaves, Miriam heard of her brother's progress. She knew when he left the School of the Priests, and heard without emotion that he was looked upon as a mighty worker of wonders. So also she heard when he was sent to the School of the Soldiers, to be trained to become head of the Army, as well as Church and State. She had known this would happen, for it was part of the regular education of an heir to the throne.

Jochebed showed a little interest in that item of news, for she saw in it a possible means whereby he might deliver the Beni-Israel. But when she voiced her thoughts, Miriam would have none of it. Moses was lost to Israel. He was an Egyptian of the Egyptians.

Then came the invasion of the Ethiopians, who swept through the country right up to Memphis itself. Panic came upon all Egypt, for the genius of Egypt lay in industry and art, not in warfare. Such armies as attempted to hold up the invaders were defeated and fled in disorder.

The emergency revealed the man. Moses had completed his military studies, but had never commanded an army. But though untried in the field, he was the most popular man in Egypt because of his magnificent physique and his handsome features. Prince, priest, warrior, athlete—he had everything which makes for popularity. And it was just that which was

needed now. Only a popular idol could check the demoralization which spelt ruin to the empire, and even those mean spirits who were envious of his popularity were among the loudest in urging that Moses should be given command of Egypt's army.

Success came to him in the field, as it had come to him in everything he had tried. His mere presence inspired the troops with confidence, and the rout was stopped. Putting himself into the position of the Ethiopian general, Moses considered the line of advance that general would expect him to take—and took another. A surprise attack gave him his first victory, and he followed it up with such energy that soon the Ethiopians were in full retreat back into their own country. Moses followed and inflicted upon them such a crushing defeat that the menace of Ethiopia was lifted for a generation.

His return to Egypt was one long triumphal procession. Egypt's millions turned out to yell themselves hoarse in praise of the man whose genius had saved them from becoming vassals of Ethiopia. The slaves of Goshen went wild with joy, for in the triumph of Moses they saw the dawn of hope for themselves. Though all Egypt called him the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and took it as settled that he would succeed Rameses, the Beni-Israel never forgot that he was born one of themselves. The prophecy made by Jannes before his birth was still treasured by the devout, and in his victory over the Ethiopians they saw the proof of his ability to lead a slaves' revolt to success.

The only one who did not share that general rejoicing was his sister Miriam. Her long brooding had warped her mind.

She had judged him a renegade, and would not think anything good of him. His very indifference to the wildly shouting slaves as he drove to Merris's palace was to her another proof that he had renounced his own race for Egypt.

She did not know the truth, and would not have believed it if told. Moses did not know that he was a Hebrew!

Miriam would have found that ignorance incredible, yet it was easily explained. Jochebed had whispered the secret to the little lad during the four years of her charge, not once but a thousand times. But she had whispered many other endearing things into his ears, the fond vanities of a mother, and the child had never understood her when she called him her son, and a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Did not Merris also call him as frequently *her* son?

Following the dismissal of Jochebed, an Egyptian woman had become his nurse, and Merris had given strict orders that no one was to breathe a word to him that he had been put in his reed cradle by a slave woman. Again and again she had told him that he was a child of the gods, sent to her in answer to her prayers, and Moses had accepted the fact without bothering about it.

It was true that his mirror of burnished bronze told him each time he looked at it that he was not the same in appearance as the other men of Egypt. But then, neither did he look like the Hebrew slaves, any more than Merris looked like the women of Egypt. Royal ancestry had produced in her an unusual type, fairer and more delicately featured than the usual type of Egyptian ladies.

His own great stature and pale olive complexion were similarly very different from the lean, slighter men of the

Beni-Israel, whose faces were darkened by exposure to the sun. Moses looked a throwback to some distant Assyrian ancestor, one of those whose features were carved in bas-relief on many a temple. That there was a mystery about his birth he knew quite well as he became a man. His name meant "Drawn out," and Merris had told him often of his finding. But, happy in her devoted love, he had no reason to vex his soul with vain queries about his origin, and so let the matter drop from his thoughts, accepting his position and using all his brilliant gifts to fit him for the destiny apparently fixed for him.

On the day when he drove in triumph through Goshen, to the palace which he always thought of as his home, he was driving on to his first big crisis, but driving in utter ignorance. Weary of tumult, he thought with satisfaction of the quiet and rest he would find with Merris. Instead of quiet, he was to meet with a revelation which should shake the very foundations of his life and weigh his soul in the balance.

Pharaoh was waiting for him with Merris, for now that he was aging rapidly Pharaoh sought increasingly the society of his daughter. Jannes, the chief priest of Egypt, had accompanied him. Though Pharaoh was nominally the head of the Church, by right of birth and office, Jannes was the most powerful of the vast order of priests who were the wealthiest and strongest party in the land.

He was also the unsuspected and relentless enemy of Moses. Though full of cunning and deceit, he had been entirely honest when he made his prophecy years before, of the birth of a child of destiny to a Hebrew woman. He had

protested with all his strength against the adoption of Moses by Merris, but a woman's whim had defeated him when it marched with Pharaoh's pride. But Jannes had not forgotten, and all through the years he had kept a vengeful eye on Moses.

His own son had been one of the defeated Egyptian generals, and that Moses should supplant his son had been the final indignity to Jannes. It fanned to flame within him the embers of his old fear and suspicion, and the journey through Goshen had added much fuel to the fire. He had sensed the excitement of the slaves, and overheard some of them talking excitedly of a "Deliverer," and his crafty mind quickly put a name to that Deliverer.

He watched the great mob of jubilant slaves accompany Moses right to the gates of the palace, and listened to their exultant shouts. Pharaoh and Merris stood close to him, and in the presence of the Princess the jealous priest dared not say a word against Moses. He found no little comfort, however, from the look on Pharaoh's face. Moses had been given such a welcome as Pharaoh had never received in Goshen, and the face of Rameses was dark with anger.

Greetings over, Merris took her "son" away for a quiet talk, and Pharaoh and Jannes were alone. It was just such a moment as he had longed for, and the priest seized his opportunity.

"Pharaoh has seen and heard," he said. "Is the meaning of this day clear to him?"

"Speak plainly, Jannes," growled Rameses. "I am in no mood for riddles."

"When Hebrew slaves hail Moses as 'Deliverer,' do they

think of Egypt?" replied Jannes. "What part have they in Egypt, to make them rejoice over the defeat of the Ethiopians?"

"Then why do they rejoice?"

"Has Pharaoh forgotten the prophecy he refused to heed?" demanded Jannes. "If Pharaoh has forgotten, these Hebrew dogs have remembered. Moses may be known in Egypt as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but in Goshen it is never forgotten that Moses is the son of a Hebrew woman who defied Pharaoh's order and saved her son alive. Of the folly which lifted a Hebrew to power in Egypt I will not speak; nor of the greater folly which trained him in the arts of war and made him a leader of men. I will not speak of these things . . . but these slaves speak of them by day and night. In him they see their hope of escape. They call him their 'Deliverer'—not from the Ethiopians, but from Egypt. Pharaoh has nursed a snake in his bosom, and unless my wisdom fails me the day is at hand when that snake will strike at Pharaoh's heart. I see the day coming when Moses will sit on Pharaoh's throne, and when Egyptians will toil in the fields while these Hebrew dogs rest at ease in the houses of those who today are their masters."

"Moses is a true man; he would never turn against me, for I have shown him only kindness," protested Pharaoh.

"Moses is the son of a Hebrew slave, and therefore he is the enemy of Egypt," declared Jannes.

As he spoke, the great form of Moses came into the room by a door hidden from the sight of Pharaoh and the priest. Merris had sent him to bring her father to her private room, where together they might listen to the story of the recent

campaign. Having all a strong man's dislike of talking about himself, Moses was only too glad to get the tale over to both in one sitting, instead of having to repeat it later to Pharaoh, and gladly agreed to the Princess's suggestion. As he approached the open door, he heard the strident voice of Jannes cry:

"Moses is the son of a Hebrew slave!"

The words struck him like a blow, but he recovered swiftly as a boxer recovers from the blow of an enemy. With only a slight check in his stride, he entered and said:

"Is Jannes beguiling the hour with tales, O Pharaoh, or is it that Jannes knows more of me than I know myself? Speak plainly, Jannes. Am I the son of Princess Merris or the son of a Hebrew slave?"

The priest swung round at his first word, his thin, cruel face blazing with the hate he had nursed through many years. Pharaoh was forgotten. He was carried out of himself by his long-cherished fear that Moses was born to make trouble for Egypt. Mingled with this was his more recent bitterness caused by the success of Moses where his own son had failed. Fear and spite combined gave his words a savage rasp.

"Son of Merris!" he sneered. "There is not a single drop of royal blood in all that great hulking body. You are lower than the meanest Egyptian peasant; a dog of a slave lifted from your kennel by a woman's folly."

"Is this true, O Pharaoh?" he asked slowly.

"Merris found you on the great river, and Jannes will have it that you were put there by a Hebrew," said Pharaoh weakly. As always when in the presence of Moses he fell

under the spell of the big man's charm. Now that he looked upon him, Rameses found it difficult to believe the priest. Moses seemed every inch a prince, so that however mysterious may have been his origin, he could not be the son of one of those thin, half-starved slaves.

Moses looked from one to the other in silence, only the heaving of his mighty chest and the quick movement of his delicate nostrils revealing the storm of emotion raging within him. He was bewildered. In a moment the very foundations of his life had heaved and slipped beneath him. He knew that Merris had adopted him by Egyptian law, and that legally he was her heir, and therefore a possible heir to Pharaoh's throne. The revelation of his lowly origin made no difference to his rights in law.

But the blow to his pride had been terrific. All his life he had been accustomed to hear the Hebrews spoken of with contempt and hatred. They were "dogs"; mean pariahs of the gutters, having the forms of men and women, but denied any human qualities or virtues. A society based on slavery could continue only so long as the difference between slave and freeman was held to be as profound as that between light and dark. Training and a lifetime's associations had inhibited him from linking the mystery of his origin with the slaves of Goshen. Yet somehow the words of the vengeful priest carried conviction, and Pharaoh's weak evasion rather confirmed than contradicted them. He suddenly felt unclean; as though the speech of Jannes had covered him with filth; that he was indeed a pariah dog whose proper place was to slink along the gutters feeding on garbage.

With a long shuddering sigh he gathered his loose outer

robe more tightly about him, turned upon his heel, and with slow, heavy steps made his way out into the long corridor. He passed the turning to Merris's room, but never noticed it. With the shock of that revelation upon him he needed space; he must get into the open, and think . . .

The palace guards let him pass unchallenged, for the look upon his face discouraged comment. Walking blindly, for though his eyes were opened widely Moses saw nothing consciously, he strode swiftly into the now empty streets near the palace, and passed on to the open sandy wastes beyond.

Hour followed hour, and still he strode on not knowing where he went, nor conscious of the passing of the time. The day which had begun with shouts of praise in his honour came to an end. His shadow lengthened upon the sand as the sun set in the darkening sky. Darkness came upon the face of the land, but Moses heeded it not. In the passion of humiliated pride, and with the compelling need to make a new orientation of all his outlook on the future, he was wholly unconscious of anything outside.

During those slow-passing hours he endured agony. He had been so proud of Egypt, for not only was Egypt mistress of the world, she was the mother of all art and all knowledge. No one knew more of her slowly accumulated stores of wisdom than he, for the priests had unveiled to him their most hidden mysteries. The slaves of Goshen had created nothing, and knew nothing. They were beasts of the fields, slow and patient and plodding, doing what they were bidden to do like cows moving endlessly round a water-mill.

And he was one of them! They had thronged about his

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chariot and yelled themselves hoarse in his praise, not because he had conquered Egypt's enemies but because he was one of their despised breed. The thought was intolerable, and he groaned aloud. Jannes had mocked and sneered at him that day in Pharaoh's very presence. So all Egypt must be mocking him in secret! Behind his back the people whispered of this beggar on horseback; this dog of a slave who strutted abroad with the arrogance of a free-born Egyptian.

How could he go back? How could he live the old, pleasant life, knowing that men thus mocked him in secret? Surely it were better to flee from Egypt to some unknown land; better, perhaps, to die.

Suddenly the fair, beautiful face of Merris came before his staring eyes, so clearly that he stopped lest he overrun her. Realizing that this was only one more trick of his disordered mind, he went on again. But that vision of Merris had given a new twist to his thoughts. Outraged pride gave place to softer, kindlier emotions. A thousand little incidents flashed through his mind, each revealing some new tenderness of the woman who had given him the love of a mother through many years.

To flee from Egypt would be to leave Merris to eat out her heart in her lonely palace; to repay untold kindness with an ingratitude which was impossible to one with his fine nature. Merris had a claim upon him which he must meet, even though it meant the daily endurance of the sneers of men like Jannes.

And Merris knew the truth of his origin! Something of

the blank despair lifted from the soul of Moses as the thought came to him like a ray of cheering sunlight in a dark place. She had known it all the time, but had never turned from him because he was a "dog of a slave." After all, what did it matter if he had been born in some unknown slave's hut? All his life had been spent in a palace or in one of Egypt's great colleges of learning. He was an Egyptian now, with a mind richly stored with Egypt's wealth of knowledge. Jannes? What of him? He was merely a spiteful, jealous priest whose words were no more worth heeding than the snapping of a yellow cur at his heels.

The terrible weight of oppression lifted from his soul, and with a heave of his shoulders as though by physical action to remove the last of his burden, Moses looked around him in the waste now flooded with brilliant moonlight to find his bearings. He did not know where he was, but he was not lost. Egypt, discoverer of astronomy, would not suffer him to be lost anywhere in the world. One glance up at the myriad stars twinkling above him told him the direction to take, and with long strides he walked swiftly homewards.

He was going back to the palace and to Merris; back to fulfil his destiny as heir to Egypt's throne. When he ruled the land he would show favour to the slaves of Goshen, and so repay the debt of his lowly origin. Meanwhile, by law and by right of achievement, he would live in that luxury to which he was accustomed.

Some slaves' huts were before him, and his path lay through their midst. As he neared them, a tall woman stepped out from one of them and began to walk with slow

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steps towards him. Moses saw her coming but gave her no thought. Yet, in a few more minutes, that unknown woman was to give him a far greater shock than Jannes had given him. In that mean hut of a slave he was to have his second and greater revelation, and because of it he would fulfil the priest's words and become an enemy of Egypt.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOSES MEETS HIS MOTHER

Miriam looked down on her mother's unconscious body with a wild grief tearing at her heart. Years of never-ending labour had worn Jochebed to a gaunt shadow of her former self. Now the tight-shut eyes and quick, shallow breathing told their own tale. Yet another slave was slipping out of Egypt's bondage into the cold arms of death.

Miriam knew it. The signs of Jochebed's collapse had been clear enough for many weeks, but until this night Miriam had wilfully shut her eyes to every warning that the end was near. All the love of her strong, passionate nature was centred in her frail mother. They had shared the same hovel in Goshen, and toiled side by side in the fields, comrades in misfortune. Their position had subtly changed with the passing years. As Jochebed weakened under the strain of exhausting toil, Miriam's vigorous strength was devoted to easing her lot, and she found her only joy in mothering the poor old woman who once had sung her to sleep at night.

Now death was coming to end that lifelong fellowship, and leave her alone to face the future. Even the stubborn unbelief of love could not deny it any longer. Only a few more hours, and she would be alone with her memories. Jochebed was dying!

Moaning her grief, Miriam dropped to her knees, her dark

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eyes straining through a blur of blinding tears to look again upon the wasted face of this mother who was also her only friend. Great sobs racked her body from head to foot as she abandoned herself to the grief which would no longer be denied. But scalding tears dropped unheeded.

"What is the matter, Miriam? Why are you weeping?"

Through the haze of tears Miriam saw that her mother's eyes had opened again, and though her voice was weak, it was so clear that she knew Jochebed was fully conscious.

"Oh, Mother, don't leave me!" she sobbed.

"I thought my Miriam had grown hard and bitter, but see, she weeps for me," said Jochebed, raising a thin hand to Miriam's bowed head.

"How can I live, if you leave me?" cried Miriam. "You are all I have in the world."

"We are in God's hands, my daughter. He has been good to me, for this day I saw my son again, the chosen of the Lord who will set Israel free."

At her words Miriam sprang erect, angrily dashing the tears from eyes which now blazed with fury.

"Your son!" she cried wildly. "The traitor who has forsaken his brethren so that he might live in comfort. The chosen of the Lord! Say rather the renegade who has chosen to be known as son of Pharaoh's daughter instead of Moses, son of Jochebed the slave!"

"You wrong him, Miriam," said Jochebed, with new vigour in her voice as once again she defended her son to the daughter who despised him. "Moses knows nothing of Jochebed; how could he deny me?"

"He has never tried to find you," flung back Miriam

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scornfully. "Moses loves only the fleshpots of Egypt, and that men should cry his name aloud in the streets as he rides by in his chariot. Now to his sins he has added this sickness of yours. In trying to escape from the crowd which ran before him you overtaxed your strength, and now the angel of death is touching you with his wings."

"Hush, Miriam!" commanded Jochebed. "Moses is my son, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. He did not know that his mother lay within that broken hut. If he had known, Moses would have leaped from his chariot and held me in his strong arms for all Egypt to see. I saw his face as he rode by, and with all my heart I thank the God of Abraham for what I saw. Moses is a prince with God and man!"

Miriam controlled her unruly tongue with a great effort. The very name of Moses always roused her to a passion of anger, but now she realized that Jochebed's brief rally was passing. The proud words which told her of a mother's unfaltering faith quavered with weakness, and Jochebed's tired eyes closed again. Miriam leaned over her anxiously, anger forgotten in the fresh alarm which came as she saw that her mother had lapsed into unconsciousness.

The hours passed, and there was neither sound nor movement within the hut. Jochebed's breathing became ever lighter, scarcely moving the wasted breast. Miriam sat by her side like a carved image, so numbed with misery that she could not even think.

"Nadab."

It was only the faintest whisper of sound from Jochebed's pale lips, but it wakened Miriam to alertness as though it had been the sound of a trumpet. Nadab had been her fa-

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ther's friend in the days before the Terror came to Goshen, and Jochebed's failing senses were wandering in those far-off, happy days when Nadab had been a welcome guest in the beautiful home to which Amram had taken his bride. Miriam did not guess that it was only a fugitive memory, a dream out of the long-dead years come to comfort her mother's last hours. She thought Jochebed was calling for her old friend, so leaning over her she whispered softly:

"Wait patiently for a little while, dearest of mothers; I will bring him to you."

The apathy of grief fell from her the moment there was something to be done. To her active nature it was the slow waiting, oppressed by the sense of utter helplessness, which had been so terrible. Movement brought her instant relief, and it was the old, vigorous Miriam who stepped out of the hut into the moon-drenched world without.

The brilliance of that glorious night after the darkness within the hut dazzled her sight for a few moments. The shadows of the huts were so black and clear-cut that they seemed like solid walls, and Miriam's first few steps were slower than her eager heart desired. Then, as her eyes adjusted themselves to the changed conditions, she increased her pace . . . to come to a sudden stop as a tall man stepped from one of those innumerable black shadows full into the moonlight, immediately before her. She saw his face as clearly as though it had been high noon; the large hazel eyes under a noble brow, the thin, high-bridged nose with its sensitive nostrils, even the individual hairs of his short, pointed beard were startlingly distinct.

The shock of the unexpected meeting was so great that

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Miriam's hands flew to her breast, and her voice was sunk to a strangled whisper as she gasped:

"Moses! What are you doing here? Have you come at last to seek out the mother who bore you?"

Moses stared back at her in blank astonishment. From her single garment of drab-coloured cotton he knew that this was one of the Hebrew slaves who spoke his name. He noted, even in that startled moment, that her features were handsome, but they wakened no memories within him. So far as he knew, she was a complete stranger to him, for all her apparent knowledge of him.

Nor did her strange words about seeking his mother mean anything to him at first. As with Miriam, the past few hours had been filled with keen emotion, and he could not at once bring his mind away from the troubled thoughts which had driven him to wander over many miles as he fought out his battle with outraged pride.

Slowly, inexorably, the words of this unknown slave-woman beat in upon his consciousness.

"Have you come at last to seek out the mother who bore you?"

Yesterday, Jannes had sneered that his mother was a Hebrew slave. Now one of those very slaves asked him if he had come to seek out his mother. Gifted with a naturally brilliant mind, which had been cultivated by years of intensive training in the schools of the cleverest people in the world, Moses was compelled to face what he now knew were facts beyond dispute. On his way to the palace of his adopted mother he had met one who knew the whereabouts of his real mother. Instead of his battle being over, it had not begun. What

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should he do? Brush past this insolent slave and go on to fulfil his destiny, and one day rule over mighty Egypt? Or ask the question which would bring him to a slave's hut where some gaunt, worked-out hag would fawn upon him and call him her son?

The temptation to go on to the palace became suddenly real and immensely strong to Moses. All the associations of a lifetime called to him. Every single friend he had was an Egyptian. All his tastes and desires were for the arts and considerable science of Egypt. All the love he had ever known had come from Merris, daughter of Egypt's ruler. Every single thing which makes life worth while was on the side of Egypt.

And against it, what? A host of thin, sun-blackened slaves with beady eyes and curved noses, beneath which thin lips twisted easily into curses they feared to utter aloud. Driven by taskmasters, they made good labourers in the brick-fields and the rich corn-lands of the Nile Valley. Many of them were possessed of a queer gift for trading, an uncanny knack which made them discover rare or precious things which they brought by night to men like Moses who loved to collect the rare or the beautiful. He had had many a deal with slaves from Goshen, in not a few of which he knew that they had bested him. They could get hold of costly bargains, but not a single Hebrew had ever created anything beautiful. To work for others, or to deal with the fruits of other men's genius, that seemed to be the place of the Beni-Israel.

From his earliest days Moses had heard them spoken of with that contempt with which ruthless oppressors ever speak of their victims. Denied every human right, and

treated worse than animals, it was not surprising that many of the Hebrews had become an offence to men like Moses. Fearless himself, he had noted with scorn their slinking, furtive gait and sidelong looks; the way in which so many of them fawned upon their masters.

To turn from Egypt's glories and opportunities in order to become one with this nation of spiritless slaves! The very idea was grotesque. He was Moses, prince of Egypt and son of Pharaoh's daughter!

These thoughts raced through his mind as he stared with unseeing eyes upon Miriam's face. She recovered first from the shock of that chance encounter, and beyond that unthinking speech jolted out of her by the unexpectedness of the meeting she uttered no word to help him in his decision. Instead, she watched his expressive face with eyes which began to shine balefully as her old furious contempt and hatred for him swept back within her soul. She read his mind as clearly as if he had spoken his thoughts aloud, and found final proof in the shrug of his shoulders as though throwing aside something distasteful.

"Yes, go back to your palace, and the curse of Abraham's God go with you," she stormed. "When you lie at ease on your soft cushions, think of the mother you will not own lying in pain upon the hard earth. While you feast at the banquets of Egypt, remember that your mother died slowly for lack of the food you waste. When men shout your praises in the streets, think to yourself that there are others who, knowing you for what you are, spit upon the ground at the sound of your name. Nile mud is not as black as your heart, you spoiled lap-dog of a rich woman. Go back and answer

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when she calls, and let her stuff you with food . . . while your mother starves."

The shrill tirade brought Moses back to realities as effectively as a blow in the face. For the first time he looked with real attention at the shrew whose shrill tongue heaped such abuse upon him as he had never known before. Miriam was worth looking at. Fury not only made her fine eyes flash; it gave her tall, shapely form a carriage which was almost regal. Moses had a momentary feeling that the slave-woman had been spirited away and her place taken by one of the gods. Scorn and loathing shook her voice and radiated from her whole person, and all the manhood of Moses revolted from the taunts she flung at him. His own face hardened, the beautifully shaped mouth thinning to a line as the words stabbed home. With the abrupt gesture of one accustomed not only to command but also to being obeyed, he flung up his hand and said curtly:

"Peace, woman! Who are you who speak thus boldly to me?"

"Who am I?" she repeated shrilly, goaded to fresh fury. "I am Miriam, your sister, one of the slaves who work to keep that fat body of yours filled with rich food. Miriam, who once thought herself clever when she tricked Merris into making your own mother nurse you before you could walk. Miriam, your sister! Do you hear me? Your sister! The woman who has worked with the strength of two in order to get food for the mother you denied. Miriam, who carried your mother on her shoulder to save you from riding her down in your chariot. Miriam, who all this night has sat

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by the side of your dying mother. Your sister . . . now deny me, as you have denied your mother!"

Moses heard her voice coming as from a great distance. His sister! At the words, flung at him with scorn and hate, something seemed to grip his very heart. This fury who lashed him with hard words was a stranger, and yet her words moved him as no other woman's words had ever done. His former indifference, almost amounting to contempt, for the Hebrew slaves, passed from him in a moment. When she challenged him to deny her, he had no thought of so doing. His only feeling was one of distress that she could be so full of anger against him.

When she paused, more for lack of breath than for lack of words, he cried in amazement:

"My sister? I did not know I had a sister."

Then, seeing that she was about to break out again, he said sternly:

"Cease these reproaches, for they are undeserved. I have told you the truth. I did not know that I had a sister. Nor, until today, did I know that my mother was a woman of the Hebrews."

"You did not know?" repeated Miriam, forced in spite of years of prejudice to believe him. "Then how did you find out?"

"I chanced to enter Pharaoh's room when Jannes the priest was speaking with him. They did not see me, and I heard Jannes say that Moses is the son of a Hebrew slave, and the enemy of Egypt," he replied.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, for the first

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time realizing the strangeness of his presence among the slaves' huts.

"I have been wandering in the desert, my mind full of many things, and this is the way back to the palace. Where is your home?" he added, a sudden desire to see his unknown mother filling his heart.

"Come, I will show you," replied Miriam, and turning she led the way back in silence. Her mind was in a whirl. In spite of herself she was convinced of Moses's sincerity. She had watched his face with eyes made doubly keen by hate, and she felt that no man lived who could lie with such manifest candour. Unbelievable as it was to her, it was none the less a fact: that Moses was hitherto wholly ignorant of Jochebed's existence. In that case he had not wilfully denied her from a false sense of shame, nor left her to the long years of want and hardship through callous neglect.

But she had fed the fires of hate too long for them to be extinguished in a few moments. She was still resentful, and ready to flare out in a second against him if by word or gesture he showed any sign of revulsion in the mean hut which was her home, or looked with coldness upon the dying Jochebed.

As she neared the hut, her thoughts switched off to her mother. In the excitement of her meeting with Moses and yielding to her angry emotions, she had been unconscious of the passing of time. Was Jochebed still alive? Forgetting her brother, Miriam broke into a quick run, and pushing open the flimsy door she flung herself by the side of Jochebed and peered anxiously into her face, lit by the moon streaming in through the one small window opening. For

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a long moment she thought that she had returned too late, and that her mother had died alone. Then, as though drawn back from the grave by the intensity of her daughter's desires, Jochebed slowly opened her eyes and smiled faintly into Miriam's face.

"Still watching by me, Miriam?" she said slowly. "You must sleep, for the fields will be waiting for you in the morning."

Moses had followed her into the hut, and, drawn by a force stronger than himself, he came close behind Miriam and now looked down upon the mother who was so great a stranger to him. He noted eagerly every detail of her appearance; the long hair so grey that in the pale moonlight it shone like burnished silver, the big, fever-bright eyes in their sunken sockets, the prominent cheek-bones and wasted flesh which told of either long sickness or years of semi-starvation, the hands which looked so tragically thin but which were compelled to toil through every hour of light. One by one his piercing eyes marked each detail, and his heart swelled big within him. Until that moment the iniquity of slavery had never entered his mind. It was the custom, to be accepted without question. Now, in the wasted form of this dying woman he saw its cruelty and wickedness for the first time, and his overcharged emotions found vent in a sound half sigh, half moan. Jochebed heard him, and looking past Miriam's shoulder she saw the great form of a man made to look even taller because of the enormous wig upon his head.

His face was in the shadow, and she could not see more than the dim outline of his mighty form, yet somehow she knew him. A mother's instinct, or the vision which comes to

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those about to die—no one can tell. She gave but a glance, and then with her worn face illumined, and all the starved mother-love of years making her failing voice strong again with the strength of youth, she lifted her shrunken arms and cried:

“Moses, my son! My son!”

Miriam moved aside, her hot heart filled with a sudden feeling of jealousy at that look of unutterable love and yearning. Not once had Jochebed looked thus at her in all the years of their close fellowship. It seemed that this brother she had so long hated had now come between her and the one person she loved.

Moses did not notice her. He had eyes only for Jochebed. Kneeling swiftly in the place Miriam had vacated, he took the thin hands within his own and tried in vain to speak. Jochebed withdrew her hands, and with this new strength which had come upon her raised her arms and put them round his neck, straining up towards him. Moses slipped his arms around her thin form, and there for a long, long minute Jochebed lay upon the broad chest of the son she had once nursed upon her knees. Breast to breast, neither spoke, for their hearts were too full for speech.

That face illumined by a great love had broken down the last reserves in the heart of Moses. This was his mother! He knew it with the certainty which neither seeks nor desires any proof. Something deep within him answered to that love-call, choking him with emotion. Jochebed was the first to break the tense silence.

“Now thanks be unto the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob!” she murmured happily. “Truly God has been

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gracious unto me, and let me not only look upon the face of my son again but lie upon his heart. Turn your face to the light, so that my eyes can look upon you, and take with me when I die a picture of my son."

Moses did as she asked, pulling off the wig he wore after the Egyptian fashion. Then, even as he had studied his mother's face feature by feature, so now his mother feasted her eyes upon the features of her splendid son, sighing with utter content.

"Truly there is not such another man in all Egypt," she murmured. "You were the child of promise, and surely all must know it when they look upon you. Yet though no other man is so fair to look upon, I can see your father Amram in you, my son. You have his eyes and brow, and the shape of your head is that of my husband."

"My father, where is he?" asked Moses huskily.

"Dead! Flogged to death by an Egyptian!" said Miriam harshly.

Jochebed and Moses had forgotten her. She had watched their absorption with her jealousy growing stronger every moment. Her fingers twitched with desire to snatch her mother from the arms of this stranger who had taken her place. Childless herself, every womanly instinct in Miriam was centred in her mother . . . and now she was put aside. Coming after the agony of fear and the riot of angry emotions on meeting Moses, her cup of bitterness was now over full, and she was almost beside herself.

The harshness in her voice broke the happy mood of her mother, bringing her abruptly back to the realities of life in Goshen. The strength given by excitement passed from her,

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so that she went suddenly limp within the arms of Moses.

"Quick, Miriam! Our mother dies, I fear," he said tensely.

Together they laid her tenderly upon the ground again, once more to wait in silent patience for the fluttering soul of Jochebed to return from the mists of unconsciousness. Minutes passed, but neither spoke. Moses was too full of strange emotions to desire speech. So was Miriam, but with very different emotions. Brother and sister, they had come together after many years. Actually they were farther apart than before, divided by a widening gulf of jealousy.

Then came another change in Jochebed. Her eyes opened wide, and she began to speak slowly and with frequent pauses as she struggled for breath.

"My time has come, my children, and I die a happy woman . . . The years have been full of pain . . . but joy has come at last. . . . I have seen my child of promise. . . . Remember and fulfil your destiny, my son. . . . The God of our fathers sent you to deliver the Beni-Israel. . . . You are a Hebrew, and when the time comes you must spoil the Egyptians who killed your father. . . . Promise me that you will deliver your brethren. . . . Promise me that before I die."

"I promise," said Moses simply, scarce heeding the task to which the words committed him. All he could think of was that the mother he had only just found was dying before his eyes. As though satisfied, Jochebed ceased her broken whispering and lay still. Her lips moved, and leaning close Moses heard her murmur:

"Amram, my husband!"

She gave a little shudder which shook her wasted form,

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and lay very still, with the moonlight shining on her face. Her soul had left the mean hut which was all man's cruelty had given her, and Moses watched with awe the swift change in her appearance. The wasted features seemed to alter before his eyes and grow young again. Something of the beauty which once had been hers came back to Jochebed in death, and Moses's last sight of the mother he had found only to lose was one which time would never efface from his memory.

Miriam neither moved nor spoke for a long time. She knew her mother was dead, but stubbornly refused to acknowledge it. She waited, as she had waited so often that night, for her mother's eyes to open again. It was not until the kindly miracle of death was completed and her mother's loved face had altered so greatly, that the floodgates of Miriam's grief were unlocked and her overcharged heart found relief in tears. With a sudden heart-broken cry she flung her strong arms round the still form and wailed her grief.

Moses let her have her way unchecked, knowing that the tears would bring her relief. But when the cocks began to crow at the return of day, he laid his hand upon her bowed shoulder and tried to comfort her with halting words of sympathy. Miriam flung off his hand impatiently and sprang to her feet, pointing to the door.

"Go back to your palace and leave me with my dead," she cried.

"She is my dead too," he answered gently. "The mother I never knew."

"She is mine, all mine," insisted Miriam violently. "Go, I tell you, and leave me to my grief. She is nothing to you, but

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she was all I had. If you have any decent feeling, go, I tell you."

One long look into the angry face, hard with jealous rage, convinced Moses that for a time at least he could do nothing to help this strange sister of his, so he said:

"I will send the embalmers to do their work. All that Egypt can do for our mother shall be done. Then, when your grief is less, I will see you again, and we will talk of what must be now I have found a sister to care for."

"I want nothing from you, nor will I take anything," she flung at him. "Egypt killed my father with whips and my mother with toil, and I will take nothing from Egypt. Go, I tell you, and never let me see your face again."

Helpless before the unreasonable anger he could not understand, Moses left the hut. A red dawn was breaking over the desert, and by the light of the swift-coming day he walked heavily back to Merris's palace by the river bank. He felt utterly weary, as never before in his life. The strain of the past twelve hours upon his emotions had taken its toll of his strength. His mind was heavy and stupid, and he could not think. The face of his dead mother kept coming and going before his vision, now wasted with hunger and sickness as when he saw it first, then with the strange beauty of death upon it. He could feel again her thin form within his arms, so pitifully light for a tall woman.

Slowly a new emotion began to enter his soul; a sullen rage against the conditions which had killed her before her time. Miriam had said with savage wrath that Egypt had killed her father. Moses's wrath mounted within him as he thought that Egypt had no less surely killed his mother. Egypt, who in her

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fear and her greed for abundant cheap labour, had enslaved a whole nation, and driven them to remorseless toil with whips which flayed the flesh from both men and women. With his own eyes he had seen upon the thin shoulders of his mother the scars which told of a slave-driver's whip laid with savage strength upon *his mother!*

A voice raised in respectful greeting made him look up, to find that all unheeding he had walked directly to the great palace which in itself was a monument to Egypt's cruelty and the Hebrews' slavery. Maybe his mother's thin hands had helped to dig the clay and mould the bricks with which it was built! Maybe his father was flogged to death on the very spot where he now stood! And he was entering the palace as heir to all its splendour. Merris, Egypt's daughter, was waiting for him, with love in her eyes as he had seen it many times.

What should he do? Take up the old life of wealth and pleasantness? Go on, as though Jochebed's thin form were not lying stark upon a mud floor, so near as distance goes, but in a world of misery so different that it might be in another planet?

His lightly spoken promise to his mother flashed into his mind that one day he would spoil the Egyptians and deliver his brethren, the slaves. When he gave the promise, to ease the dying of Jochebed, he had not realized to what he was committing himself. Now he began to realize it, in part at least. Jannes had said only a few hours before that he would be the enemy of Egypt. He had laughed then, but now, scarce twelve hours later, he was pledged to become that enemy.

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He had answered the sentry's greeting with the unthinking ease of long habit, and gone steadily on his way. Now another voice called a greeting, a voice which brought him from his unhappy thinking. Looking up, he saw Merris hurrying towards him, her fair face alight with joy.

"Moses, my son, where have you been?" she cried, taking his hands in her own. "I waited for you yesterday, to come back with Pharaoh, and did not know what to think when a slave told me that you had gone from the palace so soon after arriving. Tell me where you have been all night?"

Moses came to a stop, and looked down gravely into the fair, flushed face of the woman he had looked upon as his mother until this night of tragic revelation. The years had dealt kindly with the Princess Merris. Sheltered from the scorching sun, living delicately on the best that Egypt could provide, never wearied by a single hour of toil, she had grown from a beautiful girl to a handsome, well-preserved woman. Just now, anxiety and the joy of finding him home again had restored to her something of the freshness of youth. Moses looked into her eager face . . . and between them rose the dead face of Jochebed, burned by scorching suns, wasted by hunger, and lined with the grief of endless years.

The vision shook him, and he spoke from a heart over full, not pausing to think how his words might hurt.

"I found my mother, and watched her die!" he said simply.

Merris's face whitened and her eyes dilated. The blow was so unexpected. She herself had never thought about this unknown woman, and that Moses should have found her

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seemed a miracle. Knowing him so well, she could faintly guess what the discovery meant to him.

"Who was she?" she whispered.

"Her name was Jochebed, who, I was told, was once my nurse before you sent her away from the palace."

"Jochebed!" Merris remembered instantly her old jealousy of the nurse whom as a baby Moses had so openly preferred to her. She had not cherished that jealousy through the years, for the simple reason that she had never given another thought to the slave sent back to toil in the fields. But now she discovered that the old jealousy had never died; it was as strong as ever, and sharpened her voice as she asked:

"Where did you find her? You say you watched her die. Is that true? Is she really dead?"

Moses told her briefly of his encounter with Miriam, and the passing of Jochebed. Manlike, he never noticed the hardening of Merris's face when he spoke of Miriam, nor its softening again as he spoke in troubled tones about his sister's strange conduct and her refusal to see him again. Then, because she really loved him and felt that he was deeply distressed, Merris tried to comfort him.

"I grieve that you should have seen your mother die," she said. "I never guessed that your old nurse was really your mother, though, now I know, it makes many things plain to me. If she had lived, we would have had her back in the palace and made her last days easy for her. But now Jochebed is dead you must not think too much about her, my son. I am your real mother, the only mother you have known . . . and I love you, my son, more than anything in the world."

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Moses looked at her in silence. That Merris spoke the truth he knew. Her eyes told it as well as her lips. She had proved it, too, beyond all doubt through many years. Under other conditions he would have answered lightly, not caring for much open display of feeling, and they would have gone on together in perfect harmony. But now things were different. Egypt had killed his mother! Also he had promised her that he would become Egypt's enemy, and he was too innately honest to lie.

Merris waited for him to say something, and as the moments passed she began to grow angry with him for being unreasonable. In her anger she blundered, and widened the rift which had already begun.

"Jochebed cannot mean anything to you, Moses," she said sharply. "You can't remember her. You saw her die, and that is a dreadful thing to have happened to you, but really she was a stranger to you, so why do you look so gloomy?"

"She was a stranger to me, as you say," said Moses slowly; "but why was my mother a stranger? Why did you take me from the water, so that all men know me as the one 'drawn out'? It was because Egypt made the Hebrews slaves, and killed their babies! I have known that all my life, but only now have I seen how evil is this thing which Egypt has done to my people."

"Your people?" cried Merris. "Don't talk so foolishly, Moses, or I shall be angry. By the laws of Egypt you are an Egyptian, and one day I hope you will sit upon the throne of Pharaoh."

"I know, and I owe it all to you," said Moses with a sudden change of mood. "But none the less, these Hebrews are my

people, and I feel that we have sinned grievously against them."

Merris looked round quickly to see that they were not overheard. Reassured, she said:

"When you sit upon the throne, you can lighten the lot of the Hebrews, my son. Until then you can do nothing, and if you speak in their favour men will look upon you with suspicion. Jannes, the priest, is your enemy, and he will begin the talk which others will spread. Say nothing to any one about Jochebed. Leave it to my woman's wit to find a way to help Miriam, and wait your time before you try to help the Hebrews. Speak rashly now and you will do nothing but harm, and break my heart."

Moses listened to her with a great lightening of heart. Her words were full of wisdom. Pharaoh was aging rapidly, and in a year or two at the most he would be all-powerful in the land. Then, and only then, could he prove himself the Deliverer of the Hebrews. So with a smile upon his lips he gave a second promise, this time to his adopted mother, that he would do nothing rash.

One crowded day and night had shaken him to the foundation of his being. Another day was near in which he was to break one of those promises, and begin the fulfilment of the old prophecy.

CHAPTER FIVE

MERRIS'S MISTAKE

Excitement was in the very air within the great palace of the Princess Merris, daughter of Rameses the Great, Pharaoh of Egypt. Slave-girls, hurrying with unusual alertness on their tasks, paused for a second when they met, to exchange a whisper or laugh softly together with significant nods. Inside Merris's vast bedchamber a score of ladies-in-waiting, chosen from the best families in Egypt, worked as never before to make their royal mistress look her very best.

They spoke little, for Merris's temper was short these days. She wanted service, not talk, and spoke sharply when her wishes were not anticipated. But if they were silent her ladies outrivalled the slave-girls with their nods and meaning glances.

Life in Goshen had become a weariness to them, away from the social activities of the big cities. Any break in the monotony of the days was therefore welcome, and when that break hinted of romance in high places it thrilled their souls.

That could be the only possible explanation of all this unusual attention to her toilet. Never in all the years had they known Merris to spend so much time upon her appearance. Normally she was satisfied with her own fair face. Its beautiful features had been extolled as the ideal of Egyptian

loveliness in song and story for many years. But now with her own slim, delicate hands she carefully painted with anti-mony a black line on the upper lids of her great dark eyes, and then more carefully a thin line of soft green beneath the lower lids, peering into her mirror of burnished bronze until satisfied that she had done all that art could achieve to emphasize the seductiveness of eyes which had inspired the best poets in the lands.

The fragrance of rare perfumes with which her whole slim form had been anointed hung upon the hot, still air. Her long hair had been braided into such tresses as none but the aristocrats of Egypt were permitted to wear, and the light of the setting sun showed a glossy sheen upon the small, proud head. Finger-nails were stained bright red with henna, as were the tiny toes peeping from her papyrus sandals. Robes of the finest linen woven in Egypt, pure white save for lines of rich colours sewn upon them, covered her from neck to ankle. Big signet-rings on her fingers, and heavy chains about her still smooth neck, all of purest gold, were the final touches; each an emblem of her exalted rank.

Wholly absorbed in her task, Merris took no heed of the passing time. A hundred times she looked in her mirror, adding a deft touch here and there. One robe had been put on and discarded for another until even her huge wardrobe was almost exhausted before she was finally satisfied. Though she was now past middle life, no girl about to be presented to mighty Pharaoh could have taken more pains with her appearance than had the Princess Merris on this hot evening.

Joyous tongues had spread the news throughout the whole great palace that Merris, widowed for many years after an

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unhappy marriage, was in love! Forgetting her age, and heedless of past experience, she was making herself irresistible to some unknown lover who would come with the darkness! No one knew who was this great unknown, and so tongues wagged all the more diligently. The names of many held in honour in Egypt were lightly bandied about. One, more daringly original than the rest, declared that she knew the unknown lover was an Assyrian prince, and that Rameses would look with favour upon the union, since it might stave off the clash between the two great Empires which men feared was near.

And, as usual, rumour was wholly false. The Princess Merris had devoted all her skill to making herself attractive to win the heart of a man who was her very life—but that man was no secret lover, but her adopted son Moses.

Her woman's instinct had told her surely that a crisis had come in their relations. Until recently she had not had a single uneasy hour when she thought of him. From the day when she had found him, a waif upon the waters, he had filled her heart. One look into that lovely baby-face had made the proud Merris his slave for life. With the touch of that tiny form upon her breast she had dared to defy her father's cruel edict, and had saved alive a man-child of the Hebrews. More, she had adopted him by Egyptian law, and not only made him her son but also an heir to Pharaoh's throne.

He was hers. Every bit of her hitherto unsatisfied heart had been given to him, and all through the years she had lavished the wealth of her romantic love upon him. And

Moses had responded, giving love for love. She had watched him grow from charming boyhood to splendid manhood with ever-deepening joy and pride. The rare beauty of his baby-days had increased with the years, and now he was without a peer in Egypt. His mighty form towered above the tallest of a tall race, and it was ever a joy to her to watch the play of the rippling muscles in his great arms.

Years of unselfish devotion had caused her to forget that he was her son only by adoption. She had taught his baby lips to call her "Mother," and that sacred word had become even more precious to her as she heard it spoken in the deep tones of the man who was her greatest interest in life.

But lately that name had come infrequently in their talks together, and with a curious hesitation. The change had come on that black day when Moses had by evil chance discovered his real mother, the slave Jochebed, who once had been his nurse. He had found her, only to see her die.

Merris raged in vain against the fate which had used her so cruelly. Knowing Moses so well, she understood the effect that tragic scene had upon him. Jochebed had died of too much work and too little food, while he had lived in ease and plenty. His dead mother was an ever-living reproach, filling his waking moments with bitter feelings of resentment against the slave-system which had caused that death, and troubling his sleep at nights with uneasy dreams. Jochebed in her grave was for ever calling to him to remember that he was a Hebrew, not an Egyptian.

There was a sister, too. He had spoken of Miriam, and told Merris of her harsh reproaches against him, but there

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had been no anger in his voice, only a wistful regret that the sister of whose existence he had never known should spurn him as a renegade.

Merris had sought out Miriam the very next day, and though the passionate, overwrought woman had managed to curb her tongue in the presence of Pharaoh's daughter, Merris had seen in her a possible rival to the affections of Moses. Savage toil in the fields had darkened her skin and robbed her of the freshness of youth, but in her own way she was a strikingly handsome woman. Because they were of the same blood, Merris knew there were invisible bonds linking Miriam to Moses, and she feared that if Miriam called, Moses would turn to her.

Because she was Pharaoh's daughter, Merris had not sat down quietly under this unexpected blow, hoping for the best. Jealousy had been awakened in an instant, and her imperious will forbade inaction. The intensity of her love for Moses urged her to fight to retain his love, and to stop him from what to her was the folly of openly linking his future with that of the despised slaves.

As a policy it commended itself at once to Moses, and he agreed to follow it. If Merris had stopped there, the crisis she now faced would never have arisen. But jealousy led her to an action which had caused a daily widening rift between her and her adopted son. She used her authority to effect the secret removal of Miriam, and had her taken far away into Upper Egypt.

It seemed the simple, obvious thing to do; to remove the one whose blood-ties gave her so strong a hold upon him. She thought that, having met Miriam only once, Moses could

not feel greatly drawn towards her. Now she realized that she had blundered, when it was too late to undo the mischief. Moses had not been content when Merris told him that Miriam had suddenly disappeared: he had urged Merris to find her. As the days passed into weeks and Merris reported failure Moses became silent and moody.

During the last week he had not once delighted her ears by calling her "Mother," and each night she had found him upon the flat roof of the palace staring intently over the wide waste of sand towards the mean huts of the slaves' quarters. Twice she had gone to his room late at night, to find it empty, and her women had told her that he had left the palace, not only then, but on other nights as well.

Merris needed no further information. She did not guess; she *knew* that Moses was seeking Miriam among the slaves, and the possibilities of that quest filled her with alarm. For the moment she forgot Miriam. It was Moses for whom she feared. If the priests discovered that he was roaming through Goshen, visiting one hut after another, they would jump to the conclusion that he was doing the thing Jannes had always declared he would do one day—organizing the slaves against Egypt.

She was not sure that they had not already discovered it. They had spies everywhere in the land. Moreover, Jannes had frequently visited Pharaoh of late, and Merris had seen her father look at Moses as they ate together with a look which hinted at suspicion and growing hate. To save Moses from the consequences of what she regarded as his folly she must do something, and do it quickly.

There seemed to be only one way. Moses was thinking

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incessantly of his sister, and in his absorption he had ceased to think of her. But Merris was also a woman, and passing fair. So, to regain his interest and to retain his love, Merris summoned all her woman's wiles, and dressed herself with the careful attention another woman would have given to enslave a lover. It was to save him from prison and possible death. It was also to secure her own happiness through the few years of life to which she looked forward.

When she passed up on to the wide, flat roof, she saw him standing in the same place he had so often chosen in these unhappy days, with his face turned towards the hut in which he had seen his mother die. Lightly as she stepped, he heard her instantly and turned to greet her with the courtesy which was part of his nature. Merris's eyes softened as she looked upon him, and her voice held a world of love in it as she said:

"This is a night for dreams, my son. You look thoughtful: tell me what is in your mind as you used to in the days when you had to look up into my face."

As she spoke, she slipped her slim hand within his big arm, looking up into his sombre eyes. With all her soul she longed for him to put his arm around her slight form in one of the half-shy caresses he sometimes gave her when she had done something which gave him special pleasure. She had taken such pains this night to please him with her appearance, knowing his love for all beautiful things. She knew that as she walked towards him across the wide roof she was a picture to satisfy the artist-soul within him; not only the highest lady in the land, but also its fairest and most exquisitely gowned. Her longing was not satisfied, for at her words

Moses turned his eyes again towards the slaves' quarter and said:

"Have you any news today of Miriam?"

"No, my son. She seems to have gone away from Goshen. I have had inquiries made everywhere by my women, but no one can, or will, speak of Miriam," lied Merris.

"It is strange," he said slowly. "Egypt keeps a watch upon her slaves. The taskmasters know each slave in their company. Doubtless there are many who would flee from Goshen if they could, but they stay and toil. Yet Miriam has gone!"

"Maybe she has fled to the reed-beds, my son, and is hiding there. Others have gone that way, and I have been told that they were never found again."

"But why should she flee just when I had found her?" he asked.

"Why are you so anxious to find her?" she countered. "You saw her but once, and say that she abused you greatly. Yet ever since that night you have changed, and grown cold towards me. Has this woman of the Hebrews come between us, my son? Do you think more of a slave than of Pharaoh's daughter?"

The words slipped out in spite of herself. She had not intended asking a question which might even seem to make him decide between her and Miriam. But love outran discretion, and in her eagerness to hear him speak a word to show he was still her son in spirit she blundered into speech. Moses looked down into her fair, flushed face; into the wistful, pleading eyes the appeal of which was enhanced by Merris's deft touches with her stibium. All the artist in him rejoiced

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at her loveliness, but even as he gazed upon her, the thin, wasted face of his dead mother came between them with startling distinctness.

It had happened thus again and again ever since that tragic night. He had not been unconscious of Merris's efforts to get things back on their old footing. He had noticed her watching him, and how she had tried to please him in a hundred little things. When he turned to greet her, he had taken in with one swift glance all the careful toilet and guessed that it was meant for him.

He wanted to respond; to be able to throw off this burden which was oppressing him; to be able to talk and laugh with Merris as they had so often. He was as generous in soul as he was big in body, and so could appreciate all that Merris had done for him through the years. She was his "little mother," as he had so often called her before he had seen Jochebed die, and he had been so proud of her. The wistful appeal in her voice, and the piteous look in those lovely eyes, touched his warm heart. No one but he had ever seen the stately Merris with eyes pleading for love, nor heard her ask for tenderness. His instinctive response was to take her within his arms and assure her by voice and caress that he was, and ever would be, her son.

But it was impossible. Jochebed had come between them again. Each haggard feature, each deep-graven line of the slave-woman rose before his mental vision and blotted out the fair beauty of Egypt's princess. Her hands had tightened upon his arms and she had swayed towards him, but it seemed as though an invisible force was holding them apart.

The vision of Jochebed's dead face faded, and in its place

he saw the angry, scornful face of Miriam, taunting him with being the "lap-dog of a wealthy woman while his mother starved." He seemed to hear the strident voice mocking him yet again, telling him to go back to the banquets of Egypt and leave his true brethren to rot in misery.

Instead of uttering the assurances of unbroken love Merris longed to hear, Moses groaned aloud in anguish of soul. Instantly Merris forgot her own desires, fearing that he was ill and suffering.

"What is the matter? Tell me, my son, are you sick? Lie here while I send for some of the doctors."

"My sickness is not of the body," he replied. "It is my mind which is sick, and there are no doctors in Egypt who can cure a sick mind."

"Then tell me, and perchance one who loves you can speak the word to heal even this sickness," she pleaded.

He did not answer at once, for words did not come easily to Moses. He could think deeply and feel intensely, but like most big men he lacked the power of easy self-expression. But this night his heart was over full, and suddenly the words came pouring forth:

"I cannot understand myself! You have been a mother to me in very truth, giving me everything a man can desire, and I love you truly and deeply for all your goodness. More, I love you for your own sweet self, for the kindly heart that had compassion upon a tiny child, son of a slave. I am no ingrate! Part of me is your son today, as ever before. But now it seems that it is only a part of me; that there is another part which is a stranger even to myself; a new man who has come not only to birth but to lusty manhood within these last few

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weeks. In some strange way I have changed since the night I found my true mother and watched her die. I see her face wherever I look, and her voice is for ever calling in my ears. I cannot sleep at nights, nor keep my mind at rest through the days. A voice from the grave is calling me to rise up and break the shackles which bind my people; to set them free from the yoke of Egypt. You ask me if I love you, little mother of my old self. Here is your answer. But for you I should long since have left the palace and gone to take my place with the slaves who are my brethren! I have stayed, because I knew it would break your heart if I went. And how could I do that great evil to one who has been my best friend? I have stayed by your side, but each time I sit to eat of Egypt's plenty I see my mother's thin hand stretched out as though she would fain take the food from my lips. When I sit by your side in the cool of the evening, and the slave-girls make music to wile away the cool night hours, I hear my mother sobbing with weariness as she forced her failing strength to toil in order to keep the whip from flaying her shrivelled form. My mother! And she but one of many thousands of my race. Miriam cursed me in the name of the God of Abraham, that such might be my portion, and lo! her curse has come upon me. Waking or sleeping, I see and hear naught but the misery of Goshen. I have sought my sister, to beg her to take back her curse that I might rest in peace, but Miriam has gone, and I must go on until my weary brain gives way. I have lived in ease, and serving the gods of Egypt I have forgotten the God of my fathers, and now my punishment is come upon me."

Merris made no effort to check the flood of speech. Her

eyes grew big with fear, for to these children of the dawn in human history many things were dark and mysterious, and superstition made life at times a dreadful thing. She shared Moses's belief in the power of the curse, and to her this was the worst evil which could befall him, infinitely worse than all the scheming of the priests. She could say nothing to ease his troubled mind. Miriam alone could lift the curse and give him rest—and in her jealous fear of a rival she had caused Miriam to disappear.

In the vivid moonlight, the face of Moses showed the agony of his soul. His fine, clean-cut features were drawn, and his dark eyes were wild with the terror of things he did not understand. As his voice trailed away to silence, his big form sagged and his head drooped, and in that attitude of dejection Merris read his utter misery.

Minutes passed in silence; then with a little cry Merris hid her head upon his broad chest and gave way to a passion of sobs. Moses laid a hand upon her bowed head, smoothing the scented hair, but found no words to say. Presently Merris regained control of herself, her deep love seeking a way to help him in this dark hour. She knew that now he had spoken with such rare freedom he would do something, for he was a man of deeds rather than of speech. Fear came to her again as she wondered what action he would take, and so she asked him his intention.

"You have failed to find Miriam through your servants, so now I shall seek her myself," he replied. "I will go to my brethren and reveal myself as a Hebrew and seek their confidence. When they know that I am come to help them, maybe they will give me their trust, and if they know where

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Miriam has gone surely they will tell me. Then I will seek her out, wherever she has hidden, and beg her to take from me the curse."

"But what of Jannes, my son?" she whispered. "I fear that man! I have seen his face, and know that he hates you with a passion which is eating him up. If you go among the slaves, he will know it. The taskmasters will report your visits to him, and there are many Egyptians who live among the slaves. You cannot keep secret these visits, my son. Pharaoh will hear of them, and now he is old he is full of fears. The Hebrews are many, and our people have grown soft in these days of plenty. They hate the Hebrews, and fear them even more than they hate them. This way you would go is full of peril, Moses. Leave it to me to find Miriam, and stay quietly within the palace."

"No, my mind is made up," replied Moses decisively. "Telling you has eased my mind, and I see things clearly now. You have tried to find Miriam, and failed. Now it is for me. Surely that is why my mother's voice has been calling in my ears."

With the fear of Jannes strong upon her, and tortured by the knowledge that it was her own action in deporting Miriam which was sending Moses to the slaves, Merris argued and pleaded with him to let her have her way. He listened to all she said, only to shake his head stubbornly. Action promised relief, and to one of his temperament waiting in patience while others worked for him was harder than to attempt the task himself. So she pleaded in vain, and went to bed that night oppressed by the sense of utter failure, and full of apprehension.

Moses began his search for Miriam the next day, going openly down into the slaves' quarter. He removed the wig he wore after the fashion of wealthy Egyptians, and was dressed as an ordinary Egyptian in the loose short trousers and wide smock-like upper garment of plain white linen. But no change of clothing could disguise him. His height and broad, deep chest made him seem a giant as he moved among the lean, half-starved slaves. Against their sun-blackened faces his pale olive complexion looked almost white. In appearance he no more resembled the Hebrews than an eagle could be mistaken for a crow.

He walked among them as they went about their work, and every one of the thousands he passed was a stranger to him. He looked at them eagerly, and most of them gave back stare for stare, but in no single face did he see a sign of welcome or friendly interest. As the first day wore on, those bold stares began to trouble him. At first he had been so eager to see one whom he knew, and therefore could question about the missing Miriam, that the significance of those unwinking, almost insolent, stares failed to impress him. It was the first time he had ever moved freely and unescorted among the slaves, and his mind had been curiously stirred at the thought that racially he was one with these tall, stringy-muscled, hook-nosed men whom not even slavery could crush. Their teeming numbers, and their manifest physical fitness impressed him as a trained military leader. They were superior to the Egyptians, who had grown soft and fleshy through indulgence.

With his acute mind, Moses saw another aspect of slavery. Though it was a bitter school, it was none the less an efficient

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one in which to learn endurance. The Hebrews were paying a big price in suffering, but they were surely getting something in return. With the memory of his Ethiopian campaign so fresh, Moses could not help thinking what a mighty army he could make out of these lean men who carried their heavy loads without perceptible effort. Egypt was paying a far bigger price for her slave-system. Her men had grown soft and lazy and cowardly. If ever these slaves rose up in their vast numbers, they would tread the enervated Egyptians into the sand beneath their feet.

Hitherto Moses had shared the universal contempt for the Hebrew slaves, for that contempt was in the very atmosphere he breathed. Now, for the first time, he was letting his mind and not his prejudices influence him, and found the thoughts of a lifetime undergoing swift reversal. These were *men*, not dogs! Pride of race was born in him that day, and he began to understand his sister Miriam and her fierce scorn of one whom she had termed the "lap-dog of a wealthy woman." These men were his brethren . . . and Moses the soldier began to dream of a day when he would lead a mighty army of them from victory to victory.

It was the continuance of those unwinking stares which broke his thoughts and compelled him to consider them. It suddenly occurred to him that this was a new thing. He had, of course, met multitudes of slaves during the past years, but not one of them had ever looked at him as now every one was looking. He tried in vain to analyse those looks.

He noticed that when they met other Egyptians, especially any of the brutal type employed as slave-drivers, they averted their eyes, and their very gait changed to a slinking,

furtive thing as though they feared even to be noticed. Yet with him every eye looked boldly, almost challengingly, at one who could have broken the back of any man among them. He could not understand it, and the effect upon him in his disturbed state of mind was eventually to send him back to the palace.

The next day he was out again with the dawn, and found that some of the strangeness of the new surroundings had worn off. He found himself no longer thinking of people, but individuals; noticing not the superficial resemblance to one another in this alien race, but the decided differences in individuals. For many hours he walked with long, untiring strides over the hot sand, still seeking a familiar face but not finding one.

For a week he roamed among the slaves, never exchanging a word with any one. It was part of the campaign he had worked out, just as he had so often worked out plans in the military school. If he was ever to gain the confidence of the slaves, they must first get used to seeing him among them.

Then he began the next stage: to break down their silence. Again and again he tried to get some of the men to talk with him, but for days they would give no more than short answers to direct questions, and hurried away as soon as he released them. An impatient man would have lost his temper and so ruined any prospect of reaching friendly relations. Moses had the vast patience which is the compensating gift for those denied easy self-expression. So he went on his way, day by day, heedless of rebuffs.

He won in the end, as he knew he would. He had roused

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the curiosity of the slaves by his daily visits, and they wanted to know what this prince meant by spending his days among them. They discussed it among themselves, but could find no explanation. The next inevitable thing was the determination to find out, and that could be done only by talking with him. So the long silence was broken at last, and Moses found men eager to speak.

The first discovery he made explained those stares which had so greatly puzzled him. He discovered that every one in Goshen knew him to be the son of Amram and Jochebed! Opinions about him were divided. Jochebed had never ceased to believe in the old prophecy: that he was the child of promise who one day would set them free from Egypt; and her faith had inspired many of the older people. But Miriam had worked much harm against him. Despising him as a traitor to Israel, she had not hesitated to speak scornfully about him, and her words had influenced the younger generation. Every one knew that he had been with Jochebed when she died. So also every one knew, what Moses now learned with dismay, that Miriam had not fled to the hiding-places down in the reed-beds, but that she had been taken by force from her miserable hovel. Armed soldiers from the palace, led by men known to be in the personal service of Merris, had taken her by night and no one knew where she had gone, or if she was still alive.

The news came to Moses as a terrible blow, shattering in a moment his faith in Merris. He could not doubt the story, for not only had Miriam been seen by many who now were voluble in giving the details of the abduction, but he could see no reason why they should invent such a story. Against

his will, he found himself forced to review all that Merris had said about her supposed efforts to find his sister.

Slowly but inexorably the conviction came to him that the woman he had loved so deeply all his life had lied to him. Deep in his heart a fear grew daily stronger that Merris had ordered the murder of Miriam. He knew only too well how lightly life was regarded in Egypt, and that a slave was not thought of as much value as a horse. Slaves died swiftly if they displeased their masters. Recalling Merris's looks as well as her words, Moses knew at last that she was furiously jealous of his sister. Two women and one man!—when one of the women was a slave and the other the daughter of a despot, death for the slave became not only possible but probable.

Those who told him the sordid tale of his adopted mother's treachery watched his face, and needed no assurances that Moses had no part in Miriam's abduction. They shrank from him in fear as they saw his lips tighten to a thin line and his dark eyes smoulder with rage. His great body seemed to swell as the muscles knotted together while he fought to keep control of himself. They thought he was about to break loose and slay them with his bare hands, and sighed audibly when at last he sat down again and in a voice unnaturally quiet put searching questions to them to bring out the least details of the infamy.

In their reaction from deathly fear of the big man's rage they tried to soften his wrath by telling him that his brother Aaron was living in Memphis. Moses heard them with amazement. His brother! Neither Jochebed nor Miriam had mentioned his name, but Moses could understand that.

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Jochebed was so near to death when he found her, and so filled with joy at their reunion, that she could only think of him. Similarly, Miriam had been so full of grief and rage that Aaron was blotted out of her thoughts during those hours of tragedy and loss.

Essentially a man's man, the news thrilled Moses as nothing else had ever done. He asked eagerly what Aaron looked like, but the descriptions given were too vague for him to form any clear picture in his mind. But his informants were all agreed on one thing: that Aaron had a golden tongue. It appeared that he had a vast fund of stories reaching back to the days of Abraham, and could tell them as no other man in Goshen. A silent man himself, Moses admired eloquence in others, and his heart yearned for this unknown brother. Before he returned to the palace, he had all the necessary information to enable him to send for Aaron. Because he was Prince of Egypt his brother would be a free man within a week!

But as he walked slowly back to the palace, his thoughts switched from Aaron to Miriam—and to Merris. What was he to say to the woman who had so grossly deceived him? Speak to her of her treachery he must. Somehow he would get the truth from Merris this time . . . and if Miriam was dead? As he formed the thought, Moses knew the answer. He would leave the palace at once and take his place among his own race, and everything he knew would be devoted to raising the slaves against Egypt.

He went straight to Merris's private room and found her alone. She read his thoughts from his grim, unsmiling face, for it was what she had feared must come sooner or later

since he had roamed among the slaves. Day after day she looked with dread when he returned to see if he had heard of the action she so bitterly regretted, sighing with relief as each day ended with her secret unrevealed. Time after time she had tried to confess to him, but the words had died unspoken. She knew how Moses scorned deceit and lying. To confess would be to lose him for ever.

For one startled moment she stared at his flaming eyes and tight-shut lips. He seemed a stranger, with the face of doom. Then with a wild cry she sprang to her feet and running to meet him fell at his feet: Egypt's proud daughter humbling herself to the son of one of Egypt's slaves.

"Forgive me, my son," she sobbed. "I was mad and did not know what I was doing. You were all I had to love, and I feared that Miriam would steal your love from me. I wanted you all to myself. You are a man, and you cannot understand a woman's heart. I have loved you ever since you cried in my arms, and you had only seen her once. I thought you would soon forget her if I sent her away. How could I sit still and watch you turn to her, to give me only a little love where I have had all?"

Moses stooped and lifted her in his strong arms so that he could look straight into her eyes. Holding her thus, with his burning eyes holding hers, he said hoarsely:

"Is she still alive, or did you order her death?"

"Oh, not that, Moses!" she cried wildly. "Don't think so evilly of me. I sent her away by those I could trust, and told them to deal tenderly with her for your sake."

"Then where is she?" he demanded.

"I do not know," she confessed. "When you told me of

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the curse she had laid upon you, I knew that only she could make you well again in your mind, and the next day I sent men to bring her to you. Some of them have come back, and say that she ran from the home to which they had taken her, and no one knew where she had fled. I have given orders for all Egypt to be searched until she is found, and every day I have hoped to see her brought to us here. Wait a little longer, my son, and she must surely be found."

Moses looked at her in silence. She seemed to be speaking the truth, and he thought she was. But she had deceived him once, and his old unquestioning faith had gone.

"Did you know that I have a brother living?" he asked.

"A brother!" she echoed. "No . . . but stay, now I think I remember there was a little lad with Jochebed, but I did not know he was your brother. Why, have you found him? Is he like you?"

"He is in Memphis, and he will live with me here," said Moses evenly.

It was an ultimatum, and Merris knew it. But she had no thought for anything beyond the implied promise that Moses would continue to live with her, and so she said eagerly:

"Of course he will, since he is your brother. I will send for him at once."

But Aaron was never to live in Merris's palace. Within a week one impulsive act of Moses's was destined not only to change his future and that of Aaron, but to break Merris's heart.

ONE MAD MOMENT

"Go back to Goshen at once," said Jannes, High Priest of Egypt. "What you have told me is useful, but not enough. I want the names of all those to whom he goes at night. More important than that, I want to know what he says to them. Offer rewards so great that men will risk much to gain them. Egypt pays well those who serve her. These Hebrews will do anything for money. Offer enough, and one of them will tell you all he says."

Reret dropped his hands in salutation and hurried away. Though he knew he was Jannes's most trusted spy, he always felt uncomfortable in the presence of his master. The priest's thin, cruel face never revealed any other emotion than a swiftly roused anger. His glittering black eyes, hard as jet, seemed to probe into the darkest corners of a man's mind and read his most guarded secrets. Reret believed that he could, for was not Jannes the greatest magician in the land, holding mysterious communion every day with the spirits of the dead who revealed to him everything concerning the living?

When the little spy had gone, Jannes sat for a long time without movement. There was something unnatural about his utter immobility. Not even a nerve twitched, nor did the hard eyes flicker. His very breathing was almost imperceptible, barely moving the ribs which showed clearly on

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his lean chest. He seemed to be a lifelike statue rather than a living man.

But behind that rigid face his keen, malevolent mind was scheming the downfall of the man he had hated through many years. It was a hatred which sprang from fear, part of the price he had to pay for dabbling with the dark underworld of wickedness.

Jannes was one of those strange personalities which, fortunately, come only infrequently into the world, but whose coming causes misery to multitudes. His strong, ruthless nature was concentrated on becoming the most powerful man in the empire. Because, by the accident of birth, the throne of Pharaoh was denied him, he sought a way by which he could become the master of even mighty Pharaoh. While still a young man, he realized that if he could rule the souls of men it would make him all-powerful, and so to gain that power Jannes entered the priesthood.

He studied the various gods in which his people believed, and quickly put aside as unworthy of serious consideration the vast number of local fetishes, the small gods supposed to be the lords of isolated towns and villages. Of the more powerful gods there was one which made an insistent appeal to him. Set, the wicked brother of Osiris, was believed to be the most terrible of all gods, so powerful that he murdered Osiris and sent him into the underworld. He was the god of thunder and lightning, the god of destruction and terror, and something in the warped soul of Jannes responded to all he learned of this devil among the gods. In public he paid lip-service to the kindlier gods the people most desired to serve, but in secret he abandoned himself to the worship of

Set. In time he became like his god, a very devil among men, finding his pleasure in cruelty.

He had early gained an ascendancy over Rameses, and it was Jannes who aroused the fears of Pharaoh against the Beni-Israel which ended in their being forced into slavery. They suffered because of Jannes's lust for power, but he also paid in fear for selling his soul.

One night he had gone into the dark room no one else was permitted to enter, and had begun the mysterious incantations which would bring him into communion with the lord of the underworld. He expected some revelation from Set which would increase his power among men. Instead he had a vision of terrible things. He saw a tiny child grow swiftly to manhood, and appear in Goshen among the teeming thousands of slaves. Details were lacking, and his vision was misty and confused, but he awakened from it drenched with the sweat of fear. He had seen those slaves led by the man of his vision swarming over Egypt, slaying fiercely their oppressors until not an Egyptian remained alive and free.

Though he had often tricked others by clever conjuring which he made to appear magic, Jannes could not deceive himself about this vision. He believed it unreservedly, and because of his fear of the day when the slaves would revolt he had compelled Rameses to order the death of all boys born to the slaves. When Merris rescued Moses, it brought a raging priest into Pharaoh's presence. He had stormed and threatened, but for once he had failed. A woman's pity for a helpless baby, an inspired love filling the soul of Pharaoh's daughter as she looked upon the loveliest face in Egypt, defeated Jannes. Forced to choose between the angry priest

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and his imperious daughter, Pharaoh spoke the word which meant life to Moses.

But Jannes had not forgotten, nor had he outlived his fears. Rather, the years added to them. The lovely baby had grown into a gigantic man whose face and form made him one who had but to speak the word and men would flock to follow him. While Moses was still on the edge of manhood, Jannes saw in him a born leader of men. All Egypt hailed him as a hero when he rallied her broken armies and led them to final victory against the Ethiopians. Egypt took him to her heart, while Jannes literally writhed with baffled rage and hate.

Then, in the very hour of his triumph, madness seemed to come upon Moses and caused him to play into the hands of his unsleeping enemy. Reret had been employed for years by Jannes to spy upon Moses and report his every action, and Jannes found unaccustomed difficulty in controlling his features when his spy reported that Moses was going daily among the slaves, and spending hours in talk with those who were spoken of as the Elders of Israel.

It was inevitable that Jannes should believe that this was the beginning of what he had always believed would happen: that Moses was beginning to organize the slaves for revolt. That old, misty vision of an Egypt under the heels of maddened slaves was with the priest day and night. But to him it seemed madness for Moses to begin his treacherous work so openly. The slaves were not only without any organization; they were unarmed, and a rising could be instantly suppressed. Moses had played into his hands, and Jannes saw the day coming near when he could satisfy his hate and crush for ever the man he had hated so long. But first he must have

something definite, some witness who would swear to words spoken in secret against Egypt. Only then would Pharaoh disregard his daughter and lay hands upon the man she loved so greatly.

He had no fear that Reret would fail him. The offer of much money would bring the evidence he needed. If the spy could not bribe one of the Hebrews to betray Moses, he would buy some one who would invent and swear to false evidence. Jannes was so certain of the result that he determined to go at once to Pharaoh, who was visiting his daughter.

Reret met him at the palace gates, and with the spy was an emaciated slave whose close-set eyes looked furtively at the powerful priest. After sending on the men who had accompanied him, Jannes said to the spy:

"Who is this man? Can he give me what I want?"

"He is one Jabez, brother to Nobah, one of the leaders of the slaves," replied Reret. "Nobah has a loose tongue and a hot heart. He has talked much against Egypt for many years, and it is to his house that Moses goes most often. Jabez will tell you anything you want to hear."

The slight emphasis upon the word *anything* told the priest all he needed: Jabez was bought, and ready to swear to any lie. With that knowledge Jannes did not waste time in listening to the traitor's inventions. Instead, he told Jabez what he was to swear he had overheard Moses saying to Nobah when they thought they were alone. Jabez agreed to do so, and Jannes told Reret to remain within easy reach of the palace, ready to produce the man when sent for.

Merris met the priest with undisguised hostility. Her own

fears had been so much roused by Moses's imprudence in his search for news of Miriam that in the coming of the priest she felt positive, real peril threatened her son. Confident in the success of his scheming, Jannes treated her with a frigid politeness which increased her fears. His manner indicated that he had no need to worry whether she was friendly or hostile, and his request for an immediate audience with Pharaoh on important affairs of state deepened her alarm to the point of panic.

Rameses received him far more graciously, and Jannes knew that his task was going to be easy. Rameses had earned his title of "The Great," for he had served Egypt well. His genius was for building and constructive work, not for conquest. He had planned some of the most splendid buildings in the world, and personally supervised their erection, spending endless hours in conferences with Egypt's greatest architects. It was he who first dreamed of cutting a canal right through the Goshen valley, linking up the Nile with the Red Sea, and using it to drain the marshy lands so that the slaves could make Goshen the greatest granary of Egypt. But incessant labour had taken its toll. He looked what he was, an old man, worn out with excessive thinking. His tall, thin form stooped, and his mouth sagged at the corners. Heavy pouches under the eyes told the priest of disease within that frail body, and that soon another Pharaoh would sit upon the throne. Moses was the most likely heir, and the heart of Jannes hardened. There was no time to waste. Once on the throne, Moses could defy him, for then he would surely abandon any plans to liberate the slaves who toiled for Egypt's king.

Old men are easily alarmed at the prospect of violence and imminent death, as Jannes knew from long experience. So he began his tale with an urgency in his voice and manner which impressed Rameses as much as his words.

"I have travelled swiftly, O Pharaoh," he said, "for I have learned of terrible peril threatening Egypt. For many years I have feared it coming, and in my love for Egypt I have kept unceasing watch. Many men have been my eyes and ears, reporting to me of all that is done or said, especially among the slaves. They are many, and not scattered through the land as are our people. If they should rise as one man, who could hold them in their might? Like the Great River in the time of the floods, they would sweep over everything. I have been watching for one to rise up and speak the word which would rouse them, and lo! that man has come."

"Who is he?" croaked Rameses, his face already drawn and pale, for the brain which could dream of stately buildings and make those dreams come true was swift to visualize all the horrors of a slaves' revolt.

"Moses, the Hebrew snake you have nursed in your bosom," said Jannes in a voice as cold and merciless as death.

"Moses? You alarmed me, Jannes, when you spoke." There was relief in Pharaoh's voice, and his body lost a little of its strained position. "I know you dislike Moses, for you have often spoken to me against him, but Moses is the last man to rise against Egypt. It is not many weeks since he saved Egypt; how then can he want to destroy her?"

"I warned you years ago against letting him live at all," said Jannes. "I was warned against him in a vision, and saw then the thing he is now doing. You listened to a woman's

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pleading, and your folly may mean swift death to you very soon. Other kings before you have died because they listened to a woman pleading for her heart's desire, instead of heeding the wisdom of those who seek only their country's good. You have disregarded my warnings, but now I have proof of all that I feared."

Rameses made a last attempt to cling to his old easy tolerance of Moses, for his had been no more than tolerance to his daughter's whim. He admired the big man, but had not spent sufficient time with him for any feelings of deep affection to grow within his heart. Rameses loved buildings and statues far more deeply than he loved human beings.

"You speak of proof, Jannes," he said sternly. "Give me proof of your words and I will deal with Moses, but if your proofs do not satisfy me I will deal with you . . . for I am Pharaoh."

Jannes disregarded the threat, and his manifest indifference to it disturbed Pharaoh more than any words.

"Do you know that for many weeks Moses has spent most of the days and much of the nights talking with the Hebrew dogs?" he asked.

"No, and that cannot be. Why should he go among them?"

"Have you forgotten so soon that he is one of them?" demanded Jannes. "He looks like an Egyptian, but he is not. He is a Hebrew, and as a people they cling together more than any other race. I can bring to you a thousand men to prove my words; men who will tell you almost every hour he has spent with the slaves. I should not speak thus against one who is as a son to the Princess Merris unless I had positive

proof that he is seeking to betray and destroy the one who favoured him so greatly."

"It cannot be true! Moses does not look like a traitor," said Pharaoh, but with no real conviction in his voice.

"Listen, O Pharaoh," said Jannes, leaning forward and lowering his voice. It was a deliberate action, cunningly designed to impress the king with the fact that he was about to hear secret and vitally important news. Rameses responded as the priest expected. He leaned forward, with all trace of hesitation gone.

"There is a man named Nobah among the slaves," said Jannes softly. "He is counted a leader among them, and he has spoken much evil against Egypt. Moses sought him out, and these two have spent many hours together. I heard of it through one of my spies. Before I only guessed at trouble; now I know. This Nobah has a brother, Jabez, and the two have quarrelled over a woman. Jabez lives in the same hut, and three nights ago he overheard Moses and Nobah plotting against Egypt. They thought he slept, for indeed he pretended to sleep when Nobah looked in upon him, but his ears heard everything. He is loyal to Egypt, and reported all he heard to my spy. I think that for his service to Egypt Jabez should go free."

"But what did he hear? Moses would not seek to kill me, I am sure," said Pharaoh tremulously.

"How little you know of him!" was the scornful reply. "It is that very thing he plans to do. Jabez heard him say to Nobah that the mortar you use in your buildings is mixed with the blood of the Hebrews; and that the fat of their bodies has gone to feed the land to give food to the Egypt-

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tians. He promised that he would organize them into an army and lead them, even as he led the armies of Egypt against Ethiopia, and that very soon these Hebrew dogs will live in the houses of Egypt while our people work for them in the fields."

"Moses said that!" cried Pharaoh aghast. "I cannot believe it. Why should he destroy us? If the Princess Merris has her way, one day he will sit upon my throne and rule the land, so why should he wade through blood to what is coming to him in any case?"

"You forget the call of blood, O Pharaoh," said Jannes. "He is determined to come to the throne in either case. But he plans to make Egypt a land for the Hebrews, while Egyptians become slaves to those who are their slaves today."

"Can you trust this Jabez?" asked Pharaoh.

"I will send for him, and you can speak with him alone," replied Jannes with apparent frankness. "Listen to his tale and see if it is as I have told you."

"Have him brought in at once, for this is a terrible thing you have told me," replied Pharaoh miserably.

Hiding his exultation, Jannes hurried from the room, and a little later returned to say that Jabez would be brought in shortly. When the announcement was made that the traitor was waiting without, Jannes passed into another room, and Pharaoh examined Jabez carefully. Since his tale was the one invented by Jannes, it naturally agreed in every detail with what Pharaoh had already heard. In his panic Rameses never paused to think that the two had met before and could have agreed upon a tale. He listened, and believed.

Jabez was dismissed with a promise that he would be

rewarded for his "loyalty," and Jannes left the palace soon afterwards. Merris at once came into her father's room, eager to find out what the priest had said. Rameses refused to tell her, and she could get no more from him than a statement that he had heard news of the greatest importance to Egypt, and desired to see Moses. Merris, more troubled than ever, had to confess that Moses was not in the palace and that she did not know where he was. Rameses asked to be left alone to think over what the priest had told him, and that Moses should be sent to him immediately he returned.

The hour was very late when the big man came home. He had been down to Nobah, talking to him for hours—but not treason against Egypt. Nobah was Aaron's closest friend, and Moses could not hear enough about the brother he could not remember. Nobah delighted him with tales which the eloquent Aaron had told, and time slipped away unconsciously to Moses. He expected his brother to arrive from Memphis at any moment, and knew that he would go first to the house of Nobah to wash and change before coming to Merris's palace, and in his eagerness to meet his brother he almost lived with Nobah.

Surprised at Pharaoh's desire to see him, he hurried into the room where Rameses awaited him. The long hours alone with his thoughts had increased the old man's fears for his safety, and he had convinced himself that Moses plotted to destroy him. So real had his fears become that he had three men concealed within the room, with orders to spring upon and kill Moses if he showed the least sign of attacking the king. In his agitation Rameses rushed into direct accusation.

"I have heard of your plot, Moses! You would destroy

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those who have showered kindness upon you. All Egypt will spit at the sound of your name! You traitor! You foul ingrate!"

Moses stood still at the words, his open face revealing his amazement at the scornful words and accusing finger pointed at him.

"What words are these, O Pharaoh?" he said at last, anger overcoming astonishment.

Rameses repeated his accusation, and Moses forgot for a moment that it was his king who spoke.

"Silence!" he thundered. "No man speaks lightly against my honour. Tell me who has told you these lies, for lies they are. Who has been here today?"

"Jannes the priest has had spies watching you, and they have told him of your days spent with the slaves, and of all you plot with Nobah."

"Jannes! I might have guessed it," replied Moses, regaining his self-control. "That man has always hated me, and an enemy does not hesitate to speak lies. Listen, O Pharaoh, and I will tell you why I have gone to the slaves, and what I have said to Nobah. If you do not believe me, send for him, and for many others, and examine them as you wish. No man among the Hebrews will tell you that I have spoken a word against Egypt . . . unless perchance Jannes has bought a liar with silver."

With that he told the astonished Rameses of the tragic night wherein he had found his long-lost mother and watched her die; of Miriam and her disappearance—though in this he was careful not to say that Merris had sent her away—and of his discovery of the existence of an unknown

brother. His words carried conviction, and Rameses began to question the truthfulness of the priest. Jabez had not impressed him favourably, with his furtive looks and fawning manner.

Moses saw that he was shaken in his former beliefs, and gave him no time to rally doubts to assist the priest's attempt to ruin him.

"Wait, O Pharaoh," he said. "If you doubt me, you will not doubt your daughter. She knows the truth of all I have said. I will send her to you."

Merris was waiting eagerly for him, but at his request she went without question to her father. Rameses asked her to tell him all she knew of the recent actions of Moses in spending so much time with the slaves, and the tale which Merris told was identical with that of Moses. Rameses thus heard two stories, each told by two people. Putting Merris and Moses on one side, and on the other the priest he feared and vaguely distrusted who had produced a slinking, close-eyed slave to confirm his words, it was impossible for him to resist the conviction that the priest's story was untrue. He would not confess to himself that Jannes had deliberately planned to ruin Moses. He chose the easier way of thinking that the slave Jabez had deceived Jannes for the sake of gaining his freedom, and made Jabez the object of his wrath. Men were sent to him, not with rewards for his lying, but to give him such a flogging as he had never known.

But the seed of doubt against Moses had been sown in Pharaoh's mind. His age, and the shock of Jannes's story, made it impossible for him lightly to forget. He passed a troubled night, and his greeting the next morning was very

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distant. Moses ignored it, conscious of his innocence. He was too excited. More than enough time had elapsed for Aaron to make the journey from Memphis, and he was positive that this day he would at last meet the brother he so longed to see.

He left the palace as soon as he could, and hurried down to Nobah's house, only to find that he was working that day in the brick-fields. These were on the road which led to Memphis, and in the restless mood induced by his eager desire to meet Aaron, Moses decided to take that road. Maybe he would meet his brother by the way. At the thought his stride lengthened so that any other man would have been compelled to run to keep pace with him.

He passed beyond the miserable collection of huts which formed the slaves' dwellings, and followed the road which led close to the canal of Rameses. Date-palms grew upon its banks, and the hardy papyrus reeds had grown prolifically, so that there was shade as well as a pleasant greenness.

Engrossed in his thoughts, Moses had not noticed that he had not met any one for some time, and that apparently he had the world to himself. A sudden scream broke his thoughts and brought him to a stop. He heard a harsh voice shouting, and the sound of a whip cracking, and then again came the screams which rasped his senses. They came from some reeds near the canal bank, and Moses hurried forward. Rounding a bend in the path, he saw a sight all too frequent in Goshen, but one which Moses had not seen since the discovery that he himself was a Hebrew.

A slave-driver was flogging with his heavy hippo-whip a thin, elderly slave, who screamed with anguish as the ter-

rible blows rained upon him. In a score of places where the blows crossed one another the skin upon the slave's thin body had burst and blood was streaming from the open weals.

Moses took in every detail in one swift glance, noting the tiniest details as a man will when his faculties are highly stimulated. He saw the slave's hair was flecked with grey; that one savage blow had torn the lobe from his right ear; that in trying to shield his face with his hand one finger had been broken. He saw the swollen veins in the slave-driver's thick neck; the rippling play of the man's great shoulder-muscles, and the thickness of his powerful arm. He saw, too, with the same uncanny distinctness, every single reed behind the men, and in that sweeping glance observed that no one else was near. For some unknown reason the brutal slave-driver had his victim alone, and was flogging him to death.

Moses saw it all while his long legs took a single stride, and suddenly there rang in his ears, above the pitiful screaming of the slave, his sister Miriam's harsh voice:

"Dead! Flogged to death by an Egyptian!"

She spoke of his father Amram . . . and here before his eyes was another of his race, another man who might have been Amram himself by his age, being flogged to death by an Egyptian.

The thought stabbed into the brain of Moses like the thrust of a spear, and in an instant a terrible change came over him. All the thoughts and feelings of these crowded weeks of tense emotions came rushing up from deep within him and filled him with such rag

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never known. A red mist blurred his sight and blotted out for a moment the scene before him as the blood rushed to his head and suffused his eyes; his mouth tightened to a thin slit, and his great jaw pushed outwards. Unconsciously he had dropped to a crouch, his powerful body tensed for a mighty spring.

The tortured slave saw his fierce face, and somehow knew that deliverance had come for him. A look of surprised hope and the stopping of his pitiful screams warned the Egyptian of peril behind him, and he swung round to meet it, with his heavy whip lifted for a swift blow.

He was too late. He had only a fleeting glimpse of a vast body hurtling through the air towards him, and then a huge, knotted fist hit him with the force of a sledge-hammer behind the ear. With all the strength of the most powerful man in all Egypt behind it, a man momentarily maddened by the memory of a nation's wrongs, that mighty blow lifted the heavy Egyptian off his feet, and he fell a dozen feet away, to lie motionless.

Moses sprang after him, and seized the bloodstained whip. One slave-driver at least should taste the suffering he daily caused others. But as he lifted the whip to strike, Moses saw even in his terrible rage that which made him drop the whip unheeded. A man with a broken neck would never feel a flogging.

The red mist cleared from his eyes, and in a moment realization of what he had done came to him. He had killed a slave-driver . . . and the penalty for that in Egypt was death! Only the rigorous enforcement of that penalty made it possible for the slave-drivers to continue their task for a

day. Because he was an heir to the throne Moses might escape the penalty. A week earlier he would have risked the chance, pleading justification—that the man's brutality was robbing Egypt of a slave.

Today he dare not risk such a plea. Jannes had accused him openly of siding with the slaves, and he remembered Pharaoh's ready acceptance of the charge. The dead Egyptian would be apparent proof of the priest's charges, and in Pharaoh's present mood of suspicion and fear it was more than likely that he would speak the word which would mean banishment, imprisonment, or even death.

Moses's quick mind reviewed all the possibilities almost in a period of seconds. Either of the alternatives meant that his chances of helping the Hebrews would be gone for ever. More; he would never see either Aaron or Miriam again, and to meet them had now become the supreme desire of his heart.

The only chance for him to escape those grim alternatives was to conceal the body of the Egyptian. Looking carefully all round, he saw with relief that no one save the trembling slave had seen the swift tragedy.

"Quick, help me to bury him, and see to it that you do not speak of this to any one," he ordered as he began to scoop away the loose sand.

In a few moments the body of the Egyptian was hidden from sight, and the sand smoothed over. Then, after warning the slave again not to talk, Moses went on his way along the Memphis road.

A swift reaction followed, leaving him morose and suspicious. The killing of the Egyptian did not trouble his soul,

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for he had not meant to kill, only to give the man what he had given to others. He had struck harder than he intended, not knowing his own strength, but even so the man's death was just. He had flogged many a Hebrew to death . . . possibly he was the actual killer of Amram. The law of the time was "a life for a life," and that was the simple creed of Moses all his days. Egypt excepted that primitive law when the victim was a despised Hebrew, but Moses had reverted to his own race and would not allow that exception. A life for a life: his act avenged one at least of the slaves.

But though he could argue thus with his conscience, he knew that he had ranged himself with the slaves against Egypt. That was the very charge brought against him by Jannes; the charge he had denied to Pharaoh only a few hours before. He knew now that it was true. Given the chance, he would deal with others of the brutal slave-drivers as he had just dealt with one. Something had happened to his very soul in that swift yielding to savage fury. He had come over from Egypt to Israel. Every fibre of his being was in sympathy with his own race, and he felt a sullen rage burning in him against their oppressors.

All through the long, hot day he strode along the road, passing the brick-fields without noticing them, brooding over the wrongs of his nation. His smouldering eyes searched the faces of such travellers as he met by the way, but in none of them did he see one who answered to the descriptions given him of his brother Aaron. As the sun sank, he turned to go back to Merris's palace, knowing that yet another day had gone, and Aaron had not come.

Suspicion of Merris was now poisoning all his thoughts.

She had lied to him about Miriam, professing to be seeking for her through her servants even when they were taking her to Upper Egypt. It was Merris's men who had gone for Aaron, and they ought to have returned with him days before. Was she lying to him again? Though she had shown such love to him all his life, she was still an Egyptian and shared the common hatred of the Hebrews. Was she secretly trying to remove Aaron, as she had Miriam, to tell him later that both brother and sister could not be found?

He did not question Merris that night, for when he reached the palace it was very late and she had retired to rest. Moses left the palace the next day without seeing her, going again to the slaves' quarter. The craving to see Aaron was now an obsession, filling his mind to the exclusion of Merris and everything else.

As he made his way between the miserable hovels of the slaves, he saw ahead of him a slave-driver throw away a piece of dirty, tattered linen. The moment the Egyptian passed out of sight a slave darted out and pounced upon the cloth, and a moment later another slave rushed up and tried to snatch it from him. Soiled and worn-out though it was, it was a treasure to those who possessed nothing, and they began to fight for it like dogs over a bone.

To Moses, with his keen sense of justice, the thing was an outrage. The worthless scrap of cloth, as it was to him, manifestly belonged to the first man to pick it up. But anger was swallowed up in pity. That they should fight so fiercely for so little revealed to him the abject poverty of their lives. Running swiftly forward, he seized the aggressor by the arm and pulling him from his victim, said sternly:

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"Why do you strike your fellow?"

The man he held might be blood-brother to Jabez, who had lied for money, for they both had the same close-set, furtive eyes. Looking up into the face of Moses, the man recognized him immediately and snarled:

"Who made *you* a prince, and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?"

Moses dropped his arm like a thing unclean, and walked hastily away. His mind was in a turmoil. In spite of his solemn promise, the slave he had defended the day before had talked. Evidently his deed was known throughout Goshen, and among the vast number of slaves he knew that there would be some who would betray him for the sake of reward. The man he had just left was one of them for certain. Hence it was only a matter of hours before Pharaoh would hear of it.

He passed the day sitting in a clump of reeds by the great canal, trying to decide what was the best thing to do. There was a chance that he could make his peace with Pharaoh, but only by withdrawing wholly from the slaves. That meant he would not see his brother Aaron. Even as the thought came to him, Moses rejected it. He had moved too far from Egypt and come too close to Israel since that night when Jochebed died in his arms. He had promised her that he would try to deliver the Hebrews, and that promise must be kept. He could make no bargain with Pharaoh, for Jannes was the real power behind Pharaoh and would dictate the terms proposed.

With his mind still undecided, he came back after dark

had fallen and made his way to Nobah's house. When he entered, Nobah jumped to his feet and in a carefully lowered voice said urgently:

"You must flee from Goshen at once, Moses. Pharaoh's soldiers have been searching for you all day. They no longer spoke of you as Prince Moses, but termed you a Hebrew dog and a traitor. Pharaoh seeks your life. See, here is food which I have gathered from those who are your friends; take it, and flee to Midian until the anger of Pharaoh has died away."

"What of Aaron; has he come?" demanded Moses.

"No, and now I think he will never come, for the time is long over-past. Some evil has come to him. But now you must think of yourself, and of us who are your friends. Come back and help us, when the way is safe."

A little later Moses left him and went out into the night, his face towards Midian. The hot anger which had possessed him these last few days was upon him again. Aaron had not come. Merris had lied to him about his brother even as she had lied to him about his sister. He was done with Egypt! Pharaoh sought his life; henceforth he would live only for the day when he could break the shackles from the slaves and set them free. So, with a speed which left a trail of dust behind him, he fled eastward to find a new home.

Behind him in the palace a broken woman lay upon the floor weeping her heart out in bitter grief. Moses had misjudged Merris wholly. She knew no more than Moses why Aaron did not come. Jannes, the evil-hearted priest, could have spoken if he would. Instead, he sat in his room with a

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rare smile of content upon his thin, cruel face. At last his revenge had come. Moses was a fugitive, and the woman who had scorned Jannes so long was broken-hearted.

But for all his claims to magical powers, Jannes could not read the future. He was to meet Moses again, and there would be no laughter in his heart that day.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MAKING OF MOSES

It was a grim, harsh country, exactly fitting the mood of Moses as he made his solitary way across its trackless wastes. On every side of him great masses of grey granite and red porphyry reached their jagged crests towards the cobalt sky. The almost intolerable heat of midday was over, but still the rays of the burning sun, reflected downwards from the mountain sides and upwards from the hard ground strewn with granite chips, struck the traveller with almost physical violence.

He had walked many miles through these barren wastes and had not seen a single shrub or a blade of grass. The tireless muscles of his long legs had carried him through narrow gorges littered with boulders split from the granite walls by the heat of that relentless sun, or lifted him over the shoulders of the foot-hills as he pursued his way without chart or compass with the skill of the desert-bred. Red-necked, hooded lizards darted away at his coming, their round eyes staring at this invader of their solitude. Occasionally a snake slid sinuously out of sight behind a rock with an angry hiss. A dozen times only a quick leap aside saved him from the sting of a scorpion's tail as it struck viciously at his bare legs.

Whenever he clambered up to some craggy height which

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gave him a wider view, he shaded his eyes and stared steadily around him. Somewhere north of these savage, sterile mountains were men even more savage. Even in Egypt the name of the Amalekites was known and dreaded. They were the robber-bands of Sinai, living on the spoils raped from travellers who for safety's sake usually journeyed together in caravans. A solitary traveller would be to them as a gift from the gods, to rob of his possessions and force into galling slavery.

None but a desperate man would have ventured alone in that inhospitable, dangerous region, where the wildness of nature alone was calculated to strike terror into the heart of a man. Moses was desperate, but the violence of his emotions was such that his soul had no room for fear. He was running away from danger, and every step was a conflict between pride and reason.

By his own act he had forfeited everything most men desire. Power, wealth, life itself if he fell into Pharaoh's hands, had been thrown away—for what? Most men would have said, for a foolish, sentimental dream. Moses himself could not find the words with which to express his own motives. All he knew was that some strange power beyond his control had taken possession of him, upheaved his whole life, and set him upon a course the end of which he could not imagine.

It began with a priest's vicious sneer which he chanced to overhear; a sneer which tore away the mystery of his birth and revealed to him that he was actually the son of one of the despised slaves toiling in Goshen. Soon afterwards he heard of the prophecy that one day a Hebrew would rise

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up and deliver the slaves, and deep in his soul the conviction was born that he was that destined deliverer.

By killing a brutal slave-driver he had played into the hands of the scheming priests, and so to fulfil his destiny he must flee from Egypt, though it outraged his pride to run away. As he made his way down to the wild mountain country of Sinai, Moses tried in vain to think of some way by which he could strike back at the land which had forced him out. The more he thought, the more impossible it seemed that he could ever do anything effective, and as he realized his utter helplessness, his soul grew hard and bitter within him.

Warned by his lengthening shadow that the sun was sinking, he began to think about his camp for the night. Water was the great essential, for he had travelled far since drinking his fill at a spring he had chanced upon in a tiny rock-bound gorge. He was hungry, too, but thirst was a more insistent urge.

Ahead of him the way was barred by a great wall of granite nearly two thousand feet in height. Either he must retrace his steps and seek another way out from the chaos of mountains or scale that wall. He decided to climb, only to find it meant hauling himself upwards from ledge to ledge. A plainsman born and bred, the task taxed muscles unused to such labour, and soon the sweat was running in streams down his labouring body, blinding him, and bringing swarms of flies to add to his troubles. But slowly he won his way up until at last he reached the top . . . to cry out in amazement at the scene spread out beneath him.

He looked down upon a wide, fertile valley, deliciously

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their way towards the stone troughs and almost deafening Moses with their petulant bleating. Some of them were fighting the sheep belonging to the girls, butting them fiercely. Seeing that the water they had laboriously drawn up from the well was likely to be of no service to their own flock, the girls poured out a stream of shrill abuse at the shepherds and tried with their long crooks to drive away the rival flock.

There was nothing new in such a clash. It had happened many times before, and the lazy shepherds had learned to time their arrival at the well when the girls had nearly filled the troughs. With a roar of laughter they rushed in a body upon the screaming girls, forcing them by sheer weight to scamper from the well.

Every time until now the unfair game of Might against Right had ended in their favour, saving them much labour and doubling that of the girls. As they rushed to take possession of the prized water, they forgot all about the stranger, and never even looked at him. If they had, they would have seen the beautifully shaped lips of Moses harden to a thin line, and a strange, wanton light blaze in his big dark eyes. Every muscle in his powerful body flexed as he dropped to a crouch.

Those who knew him best knew that Moses had a passion for justice, so intense that eventually it was to make his name immortal as the greatest lawmaker of the world. The cowardice of brute force triumphing over weakness was the one thing which roused the big man's rage. Even now he was a fugitive because he had championed a slave against a bully. That act had cost him everything he possessed in the world.

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To defend these unknown girls against a dozen hardy shepherds, used to fighting against wild beasts in defence of their flocks, might easily cost him his life. He was a stranger, and the whole incident was no concern of his. Indeed, by joining in the laughter of the shepherds he could win their friendship and end his lonely wanderings by their camp fires.

Moses never even heard the voice of prudence. Since this was Might against Right, it was his concern, because he was a witness of the injustice. So, with a shout which rose clear above all the bellowing laughter of the shepherds and the bleating of the thirsty sheep, he hurled himself upon the shepherds. They had a brief glimpse of his huge form and blazing eyes, and lifted their heavy crooks to defend themselves.

Moses's first rush swept four of them off their feet; two more he caught in his sinewy hands and brought their heads together with such a crack that they took no further interest in the swift battle. Leaping over their inert bodies, he seized the crook from another and at once the odds were equalized. The shepherds used their crooks as flails, swinging them in wide arcs. Moses used his as the trained spearman he was. Easily dodging the wild sweeps of the shepherds, he drove the point of his crook at the chests and stomachs of men who had never met such a fighter in their worst nightmares.

It was all over in a couple of minutes. His breathing still unhurried, Moses looked down upon a groaning, writhing mass of men who would be too sore to laugh in comfort for many days to come. The girls had ceased their shrill abuse, huddling together and staring with round eyes at this raging cyclone bringing the new law of Right to Sinai.

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When the bruised and winded men could stand again upon their feet, Moses curtly ordered them to take themselves and their flocks beyond the grove until the girls had watered their sheep, and though they muttered evilly, the cowed men did as they were told. Then, his grim face softening with a smile, Moses called to the girls to come back to the troughs.

Not much water was left in them for the thirsty sheep, and now Moses began to break the habits of his life. As he had used his strength in the defence of woman in her weakness, so now he used it to help woman in the heavy labour which the East has always imposed upon her. Going to the well, he let down the big skin bucket and toiled with such a will that soon the shallow troughs were over full. Before this wonder, a man who both fought and worked for them, the girls were silent, too awed even to chatter.

When the last sheep had drunk its fill, the girls muttered shy thanks to their unknown champion, and, leading the sheep, set off through the grove towards the distant village. Once away from the spell of his presence, their tongues were unloosed, and the seven of them rhapsodized about the unknown who fulfilled their most cherished dreams of what a man should be.

They were sisters, the seven daughters of Jethro, Sheikh of Hazeroth, a village of the Midianites. Jethro heard their excited chattering and came out to meet them, marvelling that they were home so early. In reply to his question if anything was wrong that they had come so soon, each girl raised her voice to cry above the rest her praises of Moses, and for some time Jethro could not make anything of their story.

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When at last he had calmed them sufficiently for one to tell the story alone, he asked:

"Who was the man?"

"He was an Egyptian, but such a man as we have never seen. He fought for us, scattering the shepherds like chaff. But more wonderful than that; he even drew water for us, and himself watered the sheep."

"Where is he?" demanded Jethro. "Why have you left him? Go and bring him, so that he may eat bread with me."

Two of the girls ran off at once to bring Moses, while the others hurried into the house to prepare a meal worthy of the man who had championed their cause. Moses was still sitting by the well, keeping a watchful eye upon the shepherds as in their turn they watered their flocks. They were thoroughly cowed, for never before had they met a man like Moses, and they had no wish to offend again one who could strike so shrewdly.

Moses accepted thankfully the invitation of Jethro, for that solved the problem of food and drink. Jethro met him at the gate of the village, and Moses felt his heart go out to him. Trained to judge men, Moses knew that here was one whom he could trust to the limit. Jethro was a tall, spare man, some years older than Moses. He had the same high-bridged nose with thin, curving nostrils, and the same large, expressive eyes. But, whereas Moses was clean-shaven after the Egyptian fashion, save for his short, pointed beard, Jethro's face had a long beard and drooping moustache, which somehow gave him a venerable appearance. He fitted perfectly into the calm, pastoral scene; a quiet man, given to thought rather than to violence.

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Jethro thanked Moses for his timely service, in graceful words which went well with his dignified appearance, and led him inside the house. Shortly afterwards a younger man hurried in, and Jethro introduced him as his son Hobab. Looking at them, Moses had a queer feeling that he had met them before. Many times during the meal which followed he looked curiously at both Jethro and Hobab, puzzled by a haunting memory which he could not place.

When the women retired, Jethro asked Moses how it happened that he was travelling alone in such perilous country, and Moses told him briefly the story of his sudden fall from power. Hobab exclaimed in wonder several times during the rather curt recital. Jethro kept silent, but though he did not speak, he leaned forward with a look of wonder deepening on his face. When Moses ceased his story Jethro said quietly:

"Give thanks unto the God of Abraham, Moses, that He led your steps in safety to a kinsman in whose home there will always be a place for you."

"A kinsman?" cried Moses.

"Aye, a kinsman," repeated Jethro. "I, too, am descended from Abraham, through Keturah his wife, even as you are descended from him through Sarah."

At once Moses found the explanation of that curious feeling that he had previously met Jethro and Hobab. They were of the same race as himself, and in Goshen there were many whose features were very similar. The discovery filled him with emotion, and took away much of the bitterness of the last miserable week. He had believed himself an outcast for ever from the Beni-Israel; that he had found his people

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only to lose them. He had never dreamed that another branch of the Beni-Israel existed down here in Sinai. Once again he felt that queer, uplifting sense that his life was under the control of a Power greater than his own and that he was being guided from above.

Eagerly he pressed Jethro for further information, his quick mind already playing with the thought that he might be able to raise a sufficiently strong force with which he could make an attempt to release the slaves of Goshen. Jethro soon ended that idea. He told Moses that he was the Sheikh of the Midianites, a tribe of less than ten thousand souls, living the same pastoral life as himself in the few green valleys hidden away in the great range of mountains. Their numbers had not increased like those of the Beni-Israel in Goshen for the simple reason that the land would not support any more.

Moses lay down to sleep that night with a new-found content. He was no longer an outcast from the haunts of men, facing an uncertain future in which his liberty and even his life would depend upon his fighting powers. Nor was he an alien, receiving hospitality for services rendered, but racially one with these free, upstanding Midianites.

The next day Jethro took him out into the valley, and later they climbed a small hill from which Moses saw other strips of fertile land disappearing among the mountains. Sheep were everywhere, and in these other valleys Moses saw the villages of the Midianites. As they walked back to the house, Jethro said:

"You have seen the land, Moses, and know that it is good. My God has prospered me; and in Hobab my son I have

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one who is as my right hand. My daughters, too, are fair to look upon, and not only skilful in tending the sheep, but in weaving the wool. I have also many servants to work for me. They are free men, not slaves, and some among them are wild and fierce of heart. You saw yesterday how they treated my daughters; rough play of uncouth men which one day may cause trouble. Yet with all I have to fill my heart with thankfulness, there is ever a cloud hanging over me. Behind those mountains are the Amalekites, and I fear them, Moses. One day they will come over the mountains, to carry off my daughters and rob me of all that I have. You are the man I need, sent to me by the God I serve."

"Why do you say that?" asked Moses. "This life is wholly new to me."

"You are a soldier, skilled in the ways of war," replied Jethro. "With you by my side, teaching the men of Midian how to defend themselves against the Amalekites, I should sleep more easily at night. Will you live with me? Zipporah, my eldest daughter, is now a woman grown. Marry her and share my house, taking charge with Hobab of my flocks."

Moses thanked him for his offer and promised to give him an answer soon, and Jethro seemed well content. With the thoroughness which was his by temperament and training, Moses turned the matter over in his mind for several days, considering everything. In the end he decided to fall in with Jethro's suggestion. Though she was a tiny woman, Zipporah's features reminded him of Miriam, which gave her favour in his sight. If he was to spend the rest of his life in Midian, he might as well set up a home of his own now instead of later. From what he had already learned, tending

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sheep had its own attractions. It was a free, active life, and one which would give him abundant opportunities for long periods of silent thinking such as he loved.

Thus began for Moses the most peaceful period of his life. Not until later did he discover why he had been led into the wilderness. In the crowded years in Egypt he had passed through the Schools of the Priests and of the Soldiers. He had learned much of Egypt's arts and sciences, and by the time of his flight he was among the most highly educated men of his day.

In Midian there were no schools, but in Midian he learned what Egypt could never teach him, and was made ready for the great deeds which have made his name live through all the years. For it was in Midian that Moses found his God and grew a soul.

No man is ever entirely self-made. Behind those who mould the destinies of millions, or lead the world along new avenues of knowledge, there are always others who have helped to make them what they become; the unknown teachers or examples of whom the world is seldom aware. So it was with Moses. In the years to come he was to alter the course of human history, and his influence reach to every part of the world and continue to the end of time. And the man who made him what he eventually became was his father-in-law Jethro. His steps had been guided to the one man best fitted to help him.

Moses had not been long in Hazeroth before he discovered that Jethro was more than the Sheikh of the tribe. He was also its Priest. The discovery greatly intrigued Moses, for he, too, was a priest. Part of his training as the adopted son of

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Princess Merris had been the study of Egypt's diffuse and debased religion, but though he had been initiated into the priesthood, the religion of Egypt had never touched his soul or appealed to his clear-thinking mind. He had gone from the School of the Priests to that of the Soldiers with an inward feeling of relief.

Sometimes this indifference to religion troubled him, as that played so large a part in the life of the nation. He did not then know the truth; that it was his Hebrew origin which made it almost impossible for him really to believe the vast amount of crude superstition and gross fetishism of Egypt. With his lusty manhood it was difficult for him to give to death that large place it had in the thought of Egypt. His interest was with life, not death. Yet he was a priest of Osiris, Lord of the Underworld.

So, too, something deep within him had revolted when he saw the countless shrines erected for the worship of animals. Oxen, dogs, cats, hawks, ibises, even apes and mice, were not only believed to be the guardian spirits of whole communities, but were served by priests in sacred temples, fed with the daintiest foods, and when they died their bodies were embalmed and their mummies laid in sacred cemeteries.

Moses had always been conscious of an intuitive feeling that the whole thing was wrong, and the only result of his initiation into the priesthood was to confirm him in his feeling. Once inside the priests' ranks he had been made the sharer of their secrets and so learned the innumerable devices by which they played upon the superstitions of the people in order to enrich themselves. They were extraordinarily clever conjurers, and by sleight-of-hand tricks appeared to

work miracles with ease. Many of them, like his enemy Jannes, were diligent students of black magic, seeking communion with the spirits of the underworld, and on occasion performing acts that Moses felt were more than clever conjuring; things which were unnatural and evil. A part at least of the enmity of Jannes was inspired by the resolute manner in which Moses had refused to join with him in what he felt was devilish, for he had not taken the trouble to disguise the disgust he felt for the powerful priest.

Hence the discovery that Jethro was also the Priest of Midian had for him an unusual interest. He was utterly unlike the priests of Egypt, and Moses had found on fuller acquaintance that his first instinctive feeling that he could trust the Sheikh of Hazeroth had only deepened. Was he, after all, only a cunning trickster, or was there something different in his religion?

During the few weeks he had spent among the slaves in Goshen, seeking for Miriam, his mind had been too pre-occupied to give much heed to the religion of the Hebrews. He had been thinking of his human relatives all the while. True, he had heard constantly of the God of Abraham, but at the time it was no more than a phrase to him. Jethro had used it on the first night of their meeting, but it conveyed nothing to Moses. He might as well have spoken of Isis, Horus, or even Anubis, some of Egypt's many gods. At first he hesitated to question Jethro about his faith. Instead, he kept his eyes open as he led the sheep among the pastures tucked away between the mountains, looking for shrines similar to those he had seen everywhere in Egypt. To his astonishment he could find none. Apparently the Midianites

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were a people without a God—and yet Jethro had told him he was their priest.

At last he could no longer withhold his curiosity, and rather hesitantly asked Jethro to tell him of this God he worshipped without shrines or temples. In reply, Jethro told him of the days when their ancestor Abraham lived far away in Ur of the Chaldees, and how his spirit grew hot within him as the people began to make for themselves idols to worship, abandoning their former faith in the God of Heaven, and in the end had left Chaldea and journeyed to Canaan seeking a land in which he could settle and worship God in his own way.

Moses could follow him easily enough thus far, for he had found in Egypt many evidences of an earlier and purer faith than the degraded animal-worship. Then Jethro took him out one night when the world was hushed to silence and the sky was studded with twinkling stars and steadily shining planets, with a glorious moon bathing the peaceful valley in silver light. They walked together in silence for a time, as Jethro let the quiet and beauty of the night enter into the heart of his companion.

"You ask me what God I worship," he said at last. "It is the God who made all this. Sun and moon and stars; mountains and valley; birds, beasts, and every creeping thing—these things did not make themselves, any more than the house I live in made itself. All these things are the handiwork of my God, and in the strength of the mighty hills and in the beauty of this valley I read the nature of my God: strong and very beautiful. I worship Him, and in my worship strive also to become strong and beautiful in my soul."

Moses drew a long breath. For the first time in his life religion touched his heart. It was not merely the splendour of that perfect night. Far more was it the splendour of the man whom he now called his father; for Moses was dimly grasping the great fact that men ever see God in the light of their fellows.

"Truly such a God a man could worship and not despise himself as a coward shrinking from death, or laugh at himself in secret for bowing low to a monkey or a mouse."

"To worship such a God a man must love justice, and keep his soul from pride, since all that he has is a gift from his God," said Jethro. "Such was the teaching of our Father Abraham, and such is the teaching I pass on to my people."

"But have you no temples?" asked Moses. "Where do you worship your God?"

"We have no temple at all," replied Jethro, "for we can worship our God anywhere, since all the world is His. But there is one place which is very sacred to us, for it is there that I and my fathers before me have often communed with God. It is a high mountain a day's journey from here, with its top reaching up towards heaven and often covered with a dark cloud which I think is there to hide the face of God. I have stood upon its side many times, but no man has ever dared to scale its height and look upon the face of God."

"Take me there tomorrow," said Moses abruptly. "I would worship this God of yours, Jethro, and maybe He will reveal Himself to me upon His sacred mountain."

Neither Jethro nor Moses found anything contradictory in the idea that the God of Heaven could dwell upon a sacred mountain. Jethro owned the whole Hazeroth valley, with

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its well and vast flocks, but he dwelt in a house occupying only a tiny plot in the valley. So to him, as to all the intensely religious East, it was (and is) easy to think of God as universal, and yet occupying one especially sacred spot.

Moses had grown up with such ideas. All the many gods of Egypt were thought of as infinitely greater than men, but able so to limit themselves that they could dwell in a mouse or a beetle. The material object then became sacred, because of the spirit dwelling within it. Moses had revolted from the religion of Egypt only because the priests had chosen such inadequate objects for their gods to dwell in. Their ugliness and innate repulsiveness offended the artist-soul within him.

The Sacred Mountain of Jethro's God satisfied his sense of beauty. As he stood by the side of Jethro gazing up at the mighty peak towering into the sky, its topmost point hidden in the strange dark cloud which apparently always rested upon it, he had a sense of the fitness of things. The mountain, immovable in its immensity, seemed to be the material expression of ageless strength, creating in the soul of one who was a giant among men a sense of his own infinite littleness. Jethro's words had wakened the slumbering religious sense within the soul of Moses: the sight of the mountain of God brought it to vigorous life.

That day marked the turning-point in his life and gave him a new sense of values. Hitherto he had looked upon the life of men and nations from the point of view of a soldier, believing that as empires were won by the sword they must be held by the sword. So he had applied his keen mind to the study of military strategy and when the occasion rose had

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used his skill to save Egypt. Now a grander conception of life came to him. The frenzied motions of men, their fierce hates and violent strivings, seemed to be like the sudden scurrings of ants, and as futile, as he gazed upon that still, enduring mountain. Men came and went, their little lives soon over, but God endured from age to age.

These thoughts were with him as he led the flocks of Jethro along the peaceful valley through the days which followed. Alone, save for the dogs which he swiftly taught to drive the sheep at his commands, he passed the long days in quiet meditation. Sometimes he and Jethro would wander out together in the peaceful nights, and speak of the thoughts which filled their minds. Jethro's cup of happiness was almost over-full. He had found in the tall, handsome stranger more than a son, more even than a ready pupil. Reticent of speech though he was, Moses thought and felt intensely, and Jethro discovered that he had found a companion, one able to enter into his every thought with sympathetic understanding.

The years sped swiftly in unbroken harmony. Jethro never knew if the Amalekites discovered the presence of Moses, and how thoroughly he had trained the men of Midian to defend their homes. He only knew, and rejoiced in the fact, that the swift foray he had dreaded so long never came. Two sons were born to Moses and Zipporah with the years, and Moses knew peace within his home as well as peace in the lovely valley.

Goshen and its grinding slavery seemed a long way off; almost the memory of a former life. But Moses never forgot his brethren. The face of Zipporah was a constant reminder of his lost sister Miriam. But the bitter pain of his first days

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in the wilderness eased to a dull ache, and then to a wistful yearning that Miriam and Aaron might share his quiet, contented life. As Jethro's God became more real to him, prayer became a part of Moses's conscious life. At first it was a passionate desire for communion with Him in the silences of his own soul. Then he passed to more positive petition: that God would rise in His might and set free the Children of Abraham.

Gradually the conviction deepened within him that his prayers were to be answered, and that in His own time God would act. His mother's faith that he was the destined Deliverer came back to him, after many years in which he had ceased to think it possible that he could ever do anything. That conviction, and the military training of his earlier years, led Moses to make many a long journey. Sometimes he left the flocks for days together and wandered off alone to explore the vast chain of mountains. He learned the only practicable passes through the towering granite walls; which gorges and ravines ended in unscalable heights, and which could be followed for a space and where they must be left to link up with another route which could be followed by even a large company. So, too, he discovered many a hidden spring, and innumerable tracts of fertile land tucked away in what seemed to be arid wastes.

When he knew the land to the west and to the border of Egypt like the palm of his hand, Moses decided to travel north, to view the land from which the Beni-Israel had come in the time of famine. On the edge of the country of the Midianites he stood upon a height and looked down upon a land which seemed to him like the very garden of God.

Something deep within him urged him to go into this land of his fathers. It called to him with an insistence that he had never felt before, not even when first he looked upon lovely Hazeroth. But even as his eager feet were lifted to enter this new land, it seemed as though a hand was laid upon him, compelling him to stop. Try as he would, he could not move down from his height to the land which beckoned him.

The years of mystic fellowship with God, who now was more real to Moses than even the men he met in Midian, had taught him to heed every unusual feeling. So in this strange inhibition he believed God was speaking to him, forbidding him to go on alone. Reluctantly he turned to retrace his steps, and as he made his way homewards he had the sense of overpowering certainty that one day the Beni-Israel would return with him to the land of their fathers, there to live in peace and prosperity, free men in their own land.

How it could be, he could not imagine, for Egypt still ruled the world with a rod of iron. But that feeling of impossibility no longer crushed the spirit of Moses as it had when first he fled from Egypt. Then he had known only his own utter helplessness; that he was one against a mighty empire. In Midian he had discovered a God mightier than Egypt; and what he could not do he was positive his God could accomplish.

And the day was near at hand when upon that sacred mountain where he had first felt the nearness of God Moses was to receive the call which should set a nation free, and give him at last the brother and sister for whom he had craved so long.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PRICE OF PATRIOTISM

"Water! O God of Abraham, give me water!" Hakkatan flung up his thin arms despairingly as he croaked his prayer. Only God could have understood it, for his swollen tongue protruding between the cracked, shrivelled lips, made the words a pitiful mumble. His eyes, sunk deeply into blackened sockets, glittered with the light of a fever bordering on madness as he glared at the brazen sky.

Hopelessly lost, he had wandered for days among the bewildering labyrinth of narrow gorges which looked like gigantic slashes cleaving the great chain of mountains. A score of times he had passed narrow openings which, if he had taken any one of them, would have led him to one of the fertile, watered valleys which were the surprises of the range. But an evil fate seemed to have attended Hakkatan in his wanderings. He had missed these openings to life, and stumbled with increasing weakness along the stone-strewn gorges which the imprisoned heat of the intolerable sun turned into ovens in which every drop of moisture was baked out of his emaciated body.

Each stumbling step added to his misery, for the weight of even his small, wasted form upon his bruised and bleeding feet sent vicious stabs of pain along every outraged nerve. He wanted to lie down and die, but could not. Deep within

him the instinct of self-preservation impelled him onwards even when life had become almost unendurable suffering.

Now he had reached the end, and in his despair cried to the God he had forgotten in happier days. The rough granite walls of the gorge flung back his croaking prayer in mocking echoes. The only apparent result of his pleading gesture for mercy was the savage hiss of a startled snake as it slithered away from under the feet of the miserable wretch who had disturbed its sleep.

Hakkatan heard it, and to his disordered mind it sounded like the hiss of escaping steam from a cooking-pot. Immediately there leaped into his mental vision a tantalizing picture of succulent leeks, of tender green vegetables and savoury onions; precious memories of high days and holidays in Egypt.

He stopped and stared around. It was so real to his overwrought brain that he could imagine the very smell of cooking, and his thin, parchment-like nostrils distended in a very ecstasy of sensuous delight. The shimmering heat-haze had bothered him for days, and now the mountains themselves added to his woes. They would not keep still. First one wall leaned forward as though to fall upon him, only to sway back at the last moment. Then the opposite wall began to dance, and Hakkatan stared at its antics with incredulous eyes.

But hunger and thirst were too insistent for even mad mountains to hold his thoughts for more than seconds. He looked again for the luscious food, and among the blurred and heaving objects before him he thought he could see it at last. Again he croaked, this time a wordless prayer of

thanks, and stumbled forward with hands reached out to snatch the food which would satisfy both his hunger and his awful thirst. Five rapid steps he took, each of which left a red stain upon the sharp-edged stones . . . and then the world suddenly went very black, and Hakkatan knew no more hunger or thirst. . . .

Moses found him lying there less than an hour later. When he turned the small body over and saw the blackened face and swollen tongue, he thought the man was dead. The twitching of a tortured nerve caught his eye, and, knowing that the flickering flame of life was not quite extinguished, he picked up the wasted form in his mighty arms and strode swiftly down the gorge. Twenty yards from where Hakkatan had collapsed was a narrow fissure in the rock wall. Hakkatan had not seen it, and Moses was the only man in the world who knew that it led to a tiny canyon completely ringed in by towering mountains, but with its level floor covered with luxuriant grass because of a never-drying spring.

Ever since he had discovered it, the little canyon had been a favourite place with Moses, and one to which he often led his sheep for pasture. They knew the place, and followed him now unhesitatingly as he entered the curious "fault," or split, in the rocks and hurried to the spring. Himself desert-bred, Moses knew how to succour a man dying of thirst, and set himself to the task with a vast patience. At first he did no more than lay a strip of damp cotton upon the cracked, shrivelled lips. Later he squeezed a few drops of water on the swollen tongue, increasing the frequency of the drops as Hakkatan's tongue became more normal.

The stars had been winking merrily for hours before Moses permitted the now revived wanderer to take a really good drink, after which Moses made him eat some of the food he carried in a leather bag. With his thirst slaked and a little food within him, utter weariness came upon Hakkatan, and lying on his side he fell at once into a deep sleep.

The sun was well up before he awakened, savagely hungry, but obviously his own man again. At first he looked round with unbelieving eyes upon the sheep contentedly grazing on the thick grass. The towering granite walls all round brought back the terrible memories of his wanderings, and he shuddered. Then in the distance he saw Moses, and his eyes grew round with wonder. To Hakkatan, himself a small man, Moses seemed a very giant. He had been tending a sheep which had injured itself by a fall, and had stripped off his loose outer cloth, so that Hakkatan saw the great barrel of a chest and the powerful, rippling muscles of his wide shoulders and mighty arms.

As he came nearer, it was the face of Moses which held Hakkatan's attention, and filled him with a sense of awe. Never in his life had he seen such a face. Large, luminous eyes of richest hazel looked out serenely above a high-bridged nose. A firm, exquisitely shaped mouth was visible between a small moustache and long, square-trimmed beard of fine, silky hair. The smooth black hair on his wide forehead was parted in the middle and hung down upon his shoulders.

No man looking upon Moses these days would ever have mistaken him for an Egyptian. As soon as he came to Jethro in Midian and threw in his lot with his newly found kinsman,

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he had shown his inward revolt from Egypt by discarding the short, trimmed beard of the Egyptian aristocracy, and reverting to the fashion of the Hebrew patriarchs. The change had added to the strange beauty for which he had always been famed. But now Hakkatan saw more than mere physical beauty. Unused to finding words with which to express spiritual values, he hesitated for the right one. "Venerable" would not do, for Moses did not look old enough, and it was absurd to call one in the prime of his life by a term used of old men. "Dignified" was inadequate, for that expressed only a part of the truth. It was the impression of utter serenity; of a man at peace with God; of a great soul housed in a perfect form, which Hakkatan wanted to sum up in a word. Because the word would not come to him he sat and stared with a sense of almost fear clutching at his heart; not fear of violence at the hands of this godlike giant, but the fear of a very ordinary, not too good man in the presence of one who made him realize for the first time what goodness is—a splendidly virile, positive thing.

Moses saw only that the stranger was awake and himself again, and gave him a cheery greeting as he hurried to bring the hungry man yet more food from the capacious bag. They ate together, and when the meal was ended, Moses asked him how he came to be wandering alone among the wild mountains of Sinai. Hakkatan looked at him in silence, debating whether to speak the truth and trust this man who had brought him back from the doors of death, or to lie. And even as he thought of lying, to save himself from possible betrayal, he felt again that sense of shame. How *could* he lie to such a man?

"I am a slave of the Beni-Israel, and I have fled from Egypt," he said at last simply.

"I guessed it," replied Moses. "You are welcome, brother, for I too fled from Egypt."

"You?" cried Hakkatan in amazement. "Not many of us have succeeded in escaping, and I know the names of all who have done so. Who are you? Tell me your name, for maybe I know some of your family."

"I am Moses, sometime known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

"Moses!" echoed Hakkatan, his face revealing incredulous wonder. "We thought you had perished in the desert."

In a few brief sentences Moses told him how he had met with Jethro, and after marrying Zipporah had spent the years tending Jethro's flock. Then he asked eagerly if Hakkatan knew either Miriam or Aaron.

Hakkatan knew Aaron well, for Aaron was famous among the Beni-Israel for his skill in telling the ancient stories of the race and many others of his own invention. Miriam he had never met, but he had heard others speak of her, and so could say with confidence that she was still alive.

"But these are evil days for the Beni-Israel," added the little man. "When Rameses sat on Pharaoh's throne, we thought we knew suffering. Now he is dead and Merneptah reigns in his stead, and the sorrows of Israel are doubled. Rameses was hard, but Merneptah is cruel. He is a man to whom the weeping of women brings joy. Even the slave-drivers speak against him in secret, for their arms grow weary with flogging. See this small body of mine, Moses. Can you find a place where you can lay that big fist of yours

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without falling upon the scars left by the whips of Egypt? Men still talk of the day when you killed a slave-driver, and many a time have I cried out for another Moses to save me as I writhed in anguish. Day and night there is the sound of weeping in Goshen, and an increasing cry goes up to the God of Abraham to remember Abraham's children . . . but it seems that God has forgotten us, and that our sufferings shall have no end."

"Yours at least are ended, Hakkatan," said Moses. "Jethro will give you a home, even as he did to me. Come, let us go to him and tell him your story."

Jethro welcomed the runaway slave, as Moses knew he would, and life became a very pleasant thing for the little man. For the gigantic Moses he swiftly conceived an affection which was little short of adoration, and followed him like a dog. He knew that Moses had saved his life, and yearned to do something to prove by deeds the depth of his gratitude. Moses took him with him on many of his wanderings with the sheep, and though he was usually slow to speak, he was insatiable in his questions about the Beni-Israel, and Hakkatan told him everything he craved to know.

The effect of those long, one-sided talks was to change life again for Moses. His conscience began to reproach him for the long years of peace in Midian; accusing him of selfish indulgence while his brethren groaned beneath the iron rule of Egypt. A few years earlier it would have filled him with a bitter sense of impotence, for what could one man do against the most powerful empire in the world?

Hakkatan's tragic tale did not reduce Moses to despair, because of his new faith in Jethro's God; a faith which had

completely transformed him, and which was the real secret of that strange look of peace in his eyes which had impressed the little man. Now that his conscience troubled him with the contrast of his pleasant life and the evil days in Goshen, Moses was driven back still more to God. Nothing could show more convincingly the change within him than his conviction that he could do nothing and that it was God, and God alone, who could deliver Israel.

For many days he thought and prayed without ceasing, and as he found no relief for his troubled soul, he decided to visit again the Sacred Mountain where tradition declared God dwelt in some real and special sense. Jethro had taken him there first, and though at that time Jethro's God was little more than a name to Moses, he had nevertheless felt a sense of profound awe as he gazed up at the craggy height which no man had ever dared to scale through fear that at the top he might meet God face to face, and die. That was the belief of the time, and Moses shared it to the full.

In the agony of his soul for Israel, and his own sense of helplessness, Moses was now driven to do the thing from which his religious fears caused him to shrink. He must seek God, and plead the cause of Israel.

It seemed that God had not heard the groans of Goshen, and so a man must climb the Sacred Mountain and remind Him of His promise to Abraham, even though God should destroy him for his presumption.

To later ages, with truer ideas of God, such thoughts may seem both childish and absurd. To Moses, and to all the ancient world, even as today among the heathen nations, such

ideas were as real and as terrifying as man's ageless fear of fire.

It was therefore with that high courage which recognizes panic fear within and forces it down by terrific effort of the will—the courage of the soul, which is as high above mere physical bravery as the heavens are high above the earth—that Moses led the flocks of Jethro through the winding trails of the mountain gorges until he came to the foot of the Sacred Mountain itself. Fear of the awful thing he planned to do gripped his soul. Love for his suffering nation strove with his fear, and drove his feet along with unfaltering steps.

On the foot-hills of the towering mountain-peak he stopped and looked upwards. The dark cloud which always seemed to rest upon its summit was there again, but this day it seemed lower and darker; somehow full of menace. For all the blazing heat of the sun at midday, Moses shivered with the ghostly fears which unloose a man's joints and rob him of his manhood.

With a strong effort he pulled himself together, forcing his eyes to leave that cloud-wrapped summit where, in his passionate belief, was the very Person of God. Slowly his eyes took notice of the crags and precipices up which he must climb if he would plead his people's cause with God, seeking with the keen judgment of one who now was a trained mountain-climber the quickest and easiest way of ascent.

Then his eyes fell upon a sight which made him ejaculate in astonishment. Far above him, where no human foot had ever dared to tread, he saw a small bush which seemed to

blaze with fire. Who could have lighted it? Had another dared the ascent?

From wondering as to who could have set the bush alight his wonder turned to the bush itself. With the fierceness of its flames it should have been swiftly consumed, yet there was apparently no shrinking in its size.

To Moses it seemed an answer to the prayers of many days; a sign to beckon him upwards, to dare the ascent which faith desired to make and which fear sought to forbid.

Hakkatan, his faithful shadow, had followed him this day as always. Moses had welcomed his coming all the more because he could leave the sheep in his charge, to return them to Jethro in safety if death should come to him when he looked upon the face of God. Pointing upwards to the bush which burned yet was not consumed, Moses said:

"I will turn aside to see this great sight."

Hakkatan knew this was the Mount of God, up which no man must pass, and pleaded with Moses to stay where it was safe. His pleas were ignored, and flinging himself upon the slope, Hakkatan gazed with eyes full of misery at the man he loved moving up to worse than death. Apart from the order to remain with the sheep, he could not follow Moses upwards. His fears robbed him of all strength, so that he could not even stand to see Moses blasted with fire similar to that which blazed all round the bush.

Moses never faltered. Now the crisis had actually come, he was suddenly held in the grip of a strange exaltation. The sobs of a suffering people sounded in his ears, and he marched to an accompaniment of moans. If God had forgotten Israel, He had heard the prayers of Moses, for had

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He not come down from the mountain-top to meet him by the way? Because He had come by fire, Moses believed that God came in wrath, and therefore he would not look upon the faces of men again. But still he went on upwards. Before he was blasted with fire, he would call aloud to God to remember His covenant with Abraham . . . and so freedom would come to the Beni-Israel . . . To Miriam and Aaron.

The higher he climbed, the more the soul of Moses was filled with the sense that he was shut away from the world of men and alone with God. Jethro, priest of Midian though he was, had confessed that he dared not pass the dead-line which the faith of generations had drawn upon that mountain. Moses had passed it, trampling down fears which he could not cast out.

Later he told the story of that heart-shaking experience to his brother Aaron, declaring that suddenly God spoke to him from out the bush which blazed but did not burn. Whether that Voice shattered the awful silences of Sinai or was a Voice which spoke within the heart of Moses matters not. To the man whose high courage nerved him to ascend the mountain no other dared to do more than skirt, and who climbed it for the sake of his suffering people so that he might bring them to God's remembrance, that Voice had all the reality and authority of the audible, not whispering within his heart but thundering in his ears as it said:

"Draw no nearer, Moses. Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

Hurriedly slipping out of his loose sandals, Moses stood barefooted and with bowed head in the presence of his God. He had meant to look into the face of God as he pleaded for

Israel, but now he found he could not lift his eyes from the ground. He who ever held his head high and never lowered it before men felt all pride and self-sufficiency slip from him as a worn-out garment and stood in profound humility, yet had no sense of shaming his manhood.

But shame came to him on another count, and the words he had so carefully rehearsed were never spoken. For that Voice went on to speak of the sufferings of Israel, and Moses knew that in his thoughts and in his very prayers he had wronged the God he worshipped. He had thought God indifferent; that a man must remind Him of His promises, and lo! God knew all the tragic tale of their sufferings, and felt with them in their sorrows.

He had come to ask God to do something, and now the tables were turned upon him. God asked *him* to go back to Egypt to lead the people forth to freedom!

In that moment Moses discovered, what many another has proved, that prayer may be both a very easy and a very terrible thing. An easy thing, if it be merely throwing upon God the responsibility for changing the evil of the world: terrible, if it is utterly sincere, since then it involves a man in helping God to right all wrong and bring evil to an end. Moses had prayed, long and passionately, for Israel to be set free. Now God asked him to go back and face Pharaoh on his throne and challenge him in the name of God, risking an evil king's anger.

Moses knew too much for him lightly to accept the charge. His mind leaped back over the years, and he saw again Pharaoh sitting in state, surrounded by priests and soldiers. To appear before him would be to deliver himself into

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Pharaoh's power. All the might of the cunning priests, with their clever conjuring tricks which seemed to be miracles of supernatural origin, and some of those grim, heart-shaking things he had known the High Priest Jannes perform after long hours spent in secret communion with the spirits of the underworld, things which with all his knowledge of priestly trickery Moses had never been able to solve, would be used against him in order to make the heart of Pharaoh strong to resist. One word from Pharaoh, and the soldiers would spring upon him and lead him to one of those dark chambers beneath the Temple where the priests worked their will on victims who shrieked for death to come swiftly to end their torture.

He had dared to scale that Sacred Mountain to challenge God to do His duty, justifying his presumption by insisting that it was inspired by a selfless love for his people. Now God challenged him, to prove that he really meant all he had prayed, by risking life and liberty—or to creep down the mountain like a whipped dog, a craven whose words were big but who drew back in fear when asked to implement his words by deeds.

Then, because He knew the genuine humility which had come to Moses in the long years of solitary musing, God assured him that he would not go alone, but that He would be with him as he stood before Pharaoh. That eased the soul of Moses of some of its burden. He had climbed the mountain to be the mouthpiece of his nation: he was now to be the accredited mouthpiece of his nation's God.

But that raised in his mind a question he had asked for long, and asked in vain, of Jethro. What was the name of

this God he was to represent in Egypt's Court? Every god in Egypt was known by name, and the mere invocation of the god's name was held to bring into the conversation or the dispute of the moment the god himself. But Moses had no name for his God. Jethro, and all the Elders of Israel, had spoken of Him only as "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob"—a God known to the Patriarchs of Israel, but only a memory. He needed more than a memory: he needed a God upon whom he could call by name in the hour of crisis. So, because he knew the hour would surely come when his need would be desperate, Moses dared to ask by what name he would speak of God, both to Israel and to Pharaoh.

And the answer came swiftly: "JEHOVAH."

The God of Life.

To Moses, once priest of Osiris, lord of the underworld of the dead, the answer was satisfying in its completeness. Egypt's elaborate religions had never touched his soul, simply because he was so virile, so full of the very essence of life, that he could not force himself to the ceaseless contemplation of death. When, as priest of Osiris, he had taken part in ceremonies attended by vast crowds, he had always felt the whole thing was theatrical and unreal; that he was watching a pageant instead of getting into touch with spiritual forces.

Jethro had opened a new world of the soul to him, when he revealed his faith in a living God, the God of Heaven. But there had been limitations even to Jethro's fine faith. It was traditional; a faith inspired by what God had done for the Patriarchs of Israel. It lacked the uplift which comes

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from the conviction that God is near at hand, a very present help in trouble. The soul of Moses in his mystic musings as he passed the long days tending his flocks had touched deeper realities than ever Jethro knew. But hitherto his faith had been within him; thoughts and feelings that what he most desired must be.

Now his inner convictions received outward confirmation. In the new name revealed to him upon the Sacred Mountain, God declared Himself to be the God of the present, not of the past. "I am"—as changeless, as immovable, as timeless, as the very mountain itself. Compared with Egypt's dark faiths, it was as light compared with darkness. Truly this was a God whom a man full of the joy of life could worship.

But no sooner were his religious uncertainties settled and his soul at rest than another side of his nature influenced his thoughts. Moses was that rare product, a practical mystic, worker as well as dreamer. So with the challenge of God to him to prove his prayers by becoming the Deliverer of Israel the practical side of him swiftly visualized what must happen if he accepted that divine challenge.

He would have to convince the Beni-Israel that he was indeed sent from God to lead them from bondage to a land flowing with milk and honey. Otherwise they would never follow him across the burning sands of the desert. Then, when Israel had accepted him as their saviour, he would have to appear before Pharaoh and speak such words as would make Egypt change the policy of fifty years, and impoverish herself by losing her free labour.

These were the hidden doubts of many years, so real that

until the coming of Hakkatan Moses had abandoned all hope of himself fulfilling the prophecy of Jannes. Now that he stood in the presence of God, he could bare his soul of all its secret doubts, and so he said:

"Pharaoh will never let the people go, for all Egypt would rise against him if Egypt had to do the work which now is done by Israel."

He spoke thus because, while prince of Egypt, he had seen that the evil of the slave-system affects the slave-owners as much as it does the slaves themselves. Egypt had grown great in the days when all her people worked. Free labour had made the Egyptians become soft and luxurious, leading them to devolve upon the slaves not only the hard labour of the brick-fields, but also all work which meant fatigue. Hence the Beni-Israel had become the craftsmen as well as the manual workers of Egypt, and to lose them would be for Egypt to suffer in every part of her economic life. Because he had been trained in the ways of statecraft, Moses could appreciate the position in which Pharaoh would be placed. Even if he could make such an appeal as might soften the heart of Pharaoh, the economic results of releasing the slaves would be so disastrous that he would not dare to do so. Far more than persuasion would be necessary.

God answered his thoughts in the only way by which the very real problem of Moses could be met.

"I know Pharaoh, and I know he will not willingly let the people go. But I will put forth My hand, and smite Egypt, and afterwards he will let the people go."

Moses was not satisfied with that general assurance of Divine help. It was too vague; he wanted something definite.

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Moreover, there were the Beni-Israel to convince. They did not know him. His former contacts with the slaves had been confined to only a few of the Elders who by now would probably all be dead, for slavery does not make for old age.

Hakkatan had told him that in weariness of heart many of the Beni-Israel had forsaken even the outward worship of the God of Abraham, thinking He had forgotten them in their misery, and were now worshippers of the crude fetishes of Egypt. They would not believe that God had sent him. Nor would the more devout among the Elders. It was so long since God had spoken that they had ceased to believe He would ever speak. To revive the lost faith of Israel seemed almost as impossible as to change the heart of Pharaoh. Words, even if he could use them, would only be vapourings, and words never came easily to Moses. Deeds, and only deeds, would carry conviction, both to Israel and to Egypt. The priests used signs and wonders to keep their hold over the people, and he must be able to work even greater signs than the priests.

All he said aloud of his troubled thoughts was:

"The people will not believe me. They will say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.' "

God answered his unspoken craving for a sign, not his words.

"What is that in your hand?"

"My shepherd's crook."

"Cast it on the ground."

Moses did so, and jumped back involuntarily as he saw the writhing folds and flat, vicious head of a deadly snake, its beady eyes staring malevolently into his.

"Take hold of it *by the tail*."

The command rang in his ears, and Moses knew that this was the ultimate test of his faith in God. To obey was to court swift and painful death, for the command was opposed to reason. To handle in safety a deadly snake it must be grasped swiftly and firmly behind the head. To take it by the tail meant that in a flash those sinuous coils would be wrapped about his arms and the poisonous fangs would strike like lightning into his flesh.

He had craved for a sign, believing God could do all things, but a sign to convince others. God's answer was to convince him, so that out of a passionate conviction he could later convince others. Moses realized it, and because his faith was so fine a thing he moved swiftly forward to meet that writhing horror. With the assurance which cries, "Yea, though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," he stooped and with a hand which did not even tremble grasped the snake by the tail . . . to find he held his shepherd's crook.

He had seen things very similar in Egypt, where skilful priests had elevated conjuring to a fine art. But there had been no trickery in this, and no priest of Egypt had ever used a stick half as long or thick as his shepherd's crook.

Before his amazement could pass, leaving him with doubts as to whether he had imagined the whole thing or that it was an hallucination caused by his memory of the old days in Egypt, another command sounded in his ears:

"Put your hand within your bosom."

He did so, and when a moment later he withdrew it, he stared at it with such fear clutching his heart as even the deadly reptile had not evoked. His shapely, sinewy hand,

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tanned by scorching suns to a deep, rich brown, had become white and scaly. First a snake, the deadliest enemy to man; now leprosy, the most dreaded of all diseases! In one long, shuddering moment the vivid imagination of Moses saw all that this meant to him. That hand would shortly rot and fall from his wrist . . . but the fell disease would go on creeping through that splendid body of his. The other hand would go . . . then his face would be affected . . . and men would avert their eyes in shuddering disgust. He could not go back to his home in Hazeroth. He was unclean, and must wander among the mountains until merciful death ended his misery.

The voice of God broke in upon his terrible thoughts, bidding him put his hand again within his bosom. He did so, and when again he withdrew it he saw that it was like its fellow, smooth and clean . . . and from the bottom of his heart there came a cry of utter thankfulness.

"Those are the Signs. If the people will not believe you, they will heed those Signs."

Moses knew that it would be even so, for these were just such evidences as men might expect from Jehovah, the God of Life. Both snake and leprosy were the symbols of death, and God's appointed messenger was to show the power of God over death.

His last lingering doubt about the power of God to deliver the Beni-Israel was now removed. Moses believed that God could do anything, breaking the power of Egypt as a man might break a stick if Pharaoh resisted this mighty Jehovah. But, like many another, he unconsciously limited the power

of God in one respect. God could do anything, except change him!

"O Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor even now, since Thou hast spoken to me; I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue."

Brilliantly gifted and highly trained in all the considerable knowledge of Egypt, eloquence was the one thing he lacked. With the queer human faculty for esteeming lightly the substance in admiration for shadows, Moses craved the one thing denied him and ignored the many gifts he had which made him the ideal leader for Israel. Once again he thought with a longing tinged with envy of Aaron, his golden-tongued brother.

And once again God answered the unspoken rather than the uttered thought:

"Is there not Aaron? You shall speak to him and put My words into his mouth, and he shall be to you a mouth . . . and you shall be to him as God."

The Voice which had been so real to Moses died away, and in the solemn hush which followed Moses saw that the strange lambent flames which all the while had leaped about the bush were swiftly paling and decreasing. Soon he stood alone upon the stark mountain-side, staring steadfastly at a common acacia bush. Slowly he turned to go back to where Hakkatan waited impatiently.

He walked as a man in a trance, never seeing the rough route beneath his feet. He had not seen God face to face, but he had talked with God as a man talks with his friend. No power on earth would ever persuade him that it was not so—

and in an age when men believed that their gods assumed material forms and spoke with human voices to their priests there were none who would hint that Moses had been deceived by his own suppressed longings. He had been with God, and the glory was still about him as he rejoined Hakkatan.

It shone in his face, and the little man gazed at him with fear. He had waited in agony of soul, expecting to see Moses blasted by lightning flames. When the big man staggered back from the hissing symbol of death, Hakkatan had cried aloud, sure that death had come to the big man he loved. His heart had well-nigh stopped beating, and even now was racing unevenly within his scarred chest. He longed to pour out a flood of eager questions, but dared not speak a word as he looked into the great dark eyes of Moses, which burned as though alight with that mysterious fire which illuminated but did not destroy.

Moses led the way homewards, and many miles were covered before he broke the long silence.

"Hakkatan," he said at last. "You have told me often that you are my man, and will serve me even unto death. Now we will see if your words mean anything. Jehovah, the God of Israel, has spoken to me, and told me to go to Egypt to lead His people from bondage to dwell in the fair land of Canaan. The days of their suffering are soon to end, and peace come to them at last. Egypt will not let them go easily, and many things must happen before the years in Egypt are as an evil dream. You say that you know my brother Aaron. Will you go back to Goshen and seek him out, and bring him to me in the desert by the ford over the Red Sea?"

The little runaway had no illusions about his fate if he should be detected in Goshen. He would be flogged to death as a warning to the Beni-Israel. But a big soul dwelt within his small, wiry body; so big that it had nerved him to run away and face alone the perils of the desert, and stagger on in misery while his body craved for death. It nerved him now to face the perils of return, and so he answered simply:

"I am your man, and will do as you command."

"Then seek out Aaron, and say no more to him than this: That the God of Abraham has heard the cries of Israel, and has appeared to me in Midian; that soon with a strong hand He will lead the people out of Egypt; but first Aaron must escape and come to me to hear all that God has spoken. Say that, and no more."

Hakkatan began his perilous journey the following day, but this time he knew the safe route through the mountains, and where he could fill his skin bottle with water before venturing on the desert stage. Moses prepared to follow him, telling Jethro that he must go to see his brethren in Egypt.

God had given him signs to encourage him in the great task to which he was called. Now in his fine simplicity Moses gave to God a sign that he would go all the way appointed, and that he knew the quiet years were ended. So instead of going alone he set his wife Zipporah upon an ass, and, taking his two sons, he set out for Egypt.

He was to come again to Midian, but not until he and Egypt had learned what God meant when He said that He would smite Egypt with His wonders.

CHAPTER NINE

THE RISING OF THE SLAVES

Elisheba stared at the little man with eyes alight with suspicion and distrust. He was too well nourished to be honest. Leanness was the portion of the Beni-Israel in these days of grinding slavery. Poor food and savage toil in the brick-fields had developed a race of thin, stringy-muscled men without an ounce of superfluous flesh among them all.

This stranger who had slipped into her house just as darkness closed down upon the land was small of stature, but there was a roundness in his form which spoke of good food taken regularly and often. He was therefore obviously not one of those who sweated to make Egypt prosperous.

Yet his face revealed him as one of the Beni-Israel. To Elisheba's suspicious mind there could be only one explanation for this strange thing, a slave who was also fat: he held some secret office for the Egyptians, serving them so well that they fed him liberally. And he had asked for her husband Aaron!

"What is your business with Aaron?" she demanded for the tenth time.

"That I will tell Aaron when he comes."

Again the same reply, confirming the woman's fears. Aaron talked too much. She had told him so more times than she could remember in the long years they had shared. He

knew all the splendid stories of the patriarchs who founded the Beni-Israel, and loved to tell of the spacious days when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived as free men in the fair land of Canaan, roaming the land with their vast flocks and herds. Possessed of the magic of words, Aaron could tell those ancient stories in such a way that they seemed for ever new, and work-wearied slaves listening to his eloquent tongue forgot Egypt and for a season roamed in fancy over the uplands of Canaan.

But Aaron's stories were not always of the days of the past. He had the leaping imagination which sees not only what has been, but pictures also what shall be. To wile away the dark hours when not even slaves could toil, Aaron often talked to entranced companies of a great day to come, when Abraham's God would remember His servant, and for Abraham's sake deliver them from Egypt's bondage.

Elisheba was always fearful when Aaron let his vivid imagination run on these lines. Egypt had a vast spy system under the control of the priests, and she feared that one day her husband's gift of oratory would cause his ruin. Because of his very evident ability, and the respect shown to him by all the Beni-Israel, the Egyptians had appointed Aaron as one of their officers to supervise the slaves. Elisheba had rejoiced in his appointment, for that delivered him from the hard physical toil for which advancing years were unfitting him, but even more because of the added comforts it brought. Their hut was a little larger, and their food rations a trifle more liberal, than was the case with the rest. It was her never-ending anxiety that Aaron's tales of coming deliverance should be reported to the priests and they in their

anger degrade him from his office and send him back to the brick-fields . . . to die swiftly of the labour.

It seemed now that all her fears were well grounded, and in this sleek little stranger who came by night asking for her husband she saw those fears materialized. She wondered desperately what she could do, to warn her husband of his peril. He had been out all day, and she had no idea when he would return. Her sons, Nadab, Abihu, and Eleazer, lived in their own huts some distance away, and it might be days before she saw either of them. There seemed to be nothing she could do; only wait for grim tragedy to end the long years of toil and hunger by taking from her the man whose imaginative mind and serene faith in ultimate deliverance had made the years bearable.

Leaning against the rough wall of sun-dried clay, her hand pressed upon her heart as though pressure could slow its wild beating, she glowered at the unwelcome stranger. He smiled back at her, a smile which Elisheba misread into the taunting grin of one who delighted in the ruin he brought.

He had reduced her to panic, but would have been amazed if she had revealed the terror which his refusal to tell of his business with Aaron had induced. Hakkatan was a simple man; a creature of one idea at a time. He had been given a message by the man to whom he gave a blind, unreasoning loyalty, and told to deliver that message to Aaron and no other. To Hakkatan, that injunction applied as much to Aaron's wife as to any one else.

Instead of gloating over any tragedy he might be bringing, Hakkatan's cheerfulness and the relaxation of his plump,

small form as he sprawled on the earthen floor was the result of a mind relieved for the moment of very real perils. If Elisheba had examined him a little closer and in clearer light, she would have seen many marks upon that rounded person which would have told an eloquent tale to her or any other slave in Goshen: long scars, faint but indelible, which nothing but a slave-driver's lash could have made.

If she had not been so frankly hostile, he would have told her of the day when that dreadful flogging so maddened him that he fled with his unhealed wounds into the desert, daring almost certain death rather than live on in Goshen with the crack of the slaver's whip ever in his ears. So, too, he would have told her with a wealth of picturesque detail of the manner in which death came to meet him as he wandered for days among the baffling gorges of the Sinaitic mountain range. His little body then was not such as would have offended the eyes of Elisheba with its sleek roundness, but shrivelled and burned by heat and torturing thirst until it was little more than a skin-covered skeleton. And then he would have told her—but at this stage in his story he would no longer have sprawled upon the ground, but erect and with flashing eyes—of the godlike man who carried him to safety and nursed him back to life.

Here was a theme on which Hakkatan could rival the golden-tongued Aaron, for to Hakkatan there was no man in the world who could compare with Moses. He would have described the mighty form which could carry even a big man as easily as others lifted their children. He would have tried, but tried in vain, to picture with words that strange physical beauty which put Moses in a class apart

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from others. But most of all he would have spoken of the lovely valley in Midian, with its luscious grass and waving corn, of the flocks and camels, of the deep wells of marvelously cold waters which never failed, and of Jethro's buxom daughters who spoiled the little runaway slave and fed him with dainty food so often that now it was difficult to realize that he had ever been a walking skeleton.

Elisheba missed it all because of her easily awakened fears, but Hakkatan thought of it as he sprawled before her in well-earned ease. Moses had saved him, but at last he had done something to prove that his gratitude was far deeper than easily spoken words.

Moses wanted a message taken to his brother Aaron, and had trusted the loyalty of Hakkatan to take it. The little man had not hesitated, though to re-enter Goshen meant for him the very real possibility of being detected by the Egyptians who now were living in the midst of the slaves. Detection would mean death, for Egypt had no mercy on her runaway slaves if ever they fell again into her cruel hands. So Hakkatan had travelled by night when he entered Goshen, and lay hidden among the papyrus-reeds through the long, hot hours of the day. Only with the dusk of twilight did he venture forth to ask of passing slaves where Aaron lived.

It had been a trying, perilous journey, but he had won through. Here in Aaron's hut he would be safe for a time, and when his message was given it would be time enough to think of the perils which must be faced before he could win again to the pleasant pastures of Midian.

Not many people passed the hut. When the day's toil is

ended, slaves are too tired for the making of unnecessary effort. Nor could the steps of passers be heard within the hut as they shuffled through the loose sand. So it was that Aaron entered before either of the two who waited for him with such different feelings even knew that he was near. Elisheba saw him first, and with all her love sharpening her voice she cried:

"Flee for your life, Aaron! Here is a spy of the Egyptians come to deliver you into their hands, and to death."

Aaron glanced at Hakkatan, who had jumped to his feet, and at the sight of the little man staring at him with round eyes of astonishment he laughed aloud.

"Have no fear, Elisheba," he said soothingly. "If the Egyptians wanted me, they would send a *man* to take me."

"Spy! I am no spy," cried Hakkatan. "I have come to you from Midian, where I fled to escape from the accursed Egyptians, and I bring you a message from Moses."

"Now thanks be unto the God of my fathers that Moses is yet alive!" said Aaron fervently. "It is many years since he struck a blow for Israel, and I feared that he perished in the desert, or at the hands of men even more cruel than the desert. What is his message?"

"It is for your ears alone," replied Hakkatan stubbornly.

Picking up the tiny clay lamp, in which a wick of cotton floating in oil gave a little light and much smoke, Aaron moved over to Hakkatan and looked long into his face. Satisfied with what he saw, he said evenly:

"I have no secrets from Elisheba, my wife. Speak your message to us both."

Hakkatan hesitated, his literal mind urging him to silence,

but the instinct to obey a stronger nature overcoming his scruples.

"It is this," he said at last. "Moses told me to say to you, 'The God of Abraham has heard the cries of Israel, and has appeared to me in Midian; that soon with a strong hand He will lead the people out of Egypt; but first Aaron must escape and come to me in Midian to hear all that God has spoken.' That is the word of Moses, whom I serve; and I will lead you to him."

"Who are you, who speak so easily of escaping from Egypt?" demanded Elisheba, her distrust of the stranger unshaken.

"I am Hakkatan, and once before I escaped from Egypt," replied the little man with a grin. "Hold the light close, and see the marks of Egypt upon my body."

"I have heard of Hakkatan, and that he fled towards the desert," said Aaron slowly. "He, too, was said to be a little man. But if it is indeed you who escaped, how is it that you dare to return? It is death for you if you are seen."

"Moses asked me to come, and I came," he replied simply. "He saved me when I was almost dead, and henceforth my life is his."

Voice and manner even more than the words were eloquent of sincerity, and Aaron at least was convinced. Bidding Hakkatan take his seat again, he poured out endless questions about the brother whom he had not seen since childhood, but of whom he had heard so much until the long silence of recent years. From Jochebed, his dead mother, he had heard of the splendid physical beauty of Moses, told with all a mother's pride. A hundred times she had declared

that Moses was the child of promise, that one who when the day came should deliver Israel from bondage. Now Hakkatan came with a message which brought his dead mother's words back again with startling force.

Others had told him of the prowess of Moses as a warrior, and that he was skilled in all the learning of Egypt. Once, long years ago, men had come from the Princess Merris to bring him from Memphis to meet his brother Moses, but he had arrived the day after Moses had fled from Goshen after killing an Egyptian. Aaron had been taken to the palace, and he could never wholly forget the passionate grief of the proud princess when she realized that never again in this world would she behold the man who had been a son to her. Sometimes he thought that it was grief which killed her, for she never appeared again in public, and a few months later all Egypt went into mourning for Egypt's lovely daughter.

True, he had heard other things about Moses from his sister Miriam; harsh, bitter complaints of one who lived in luxury while his mother died of toil and hunger. But some of the Elders of Israel had told him of the vain attempts of Moses to find his sister, and of the weeks when he roamed through Goshen seeking news of her. In the end he dismissed the complaints of Miriam as due to the hardness of her lot, and in secret nursed a great pride in the brother who for a space had been the idol of Egypt.

The night was far spent before Hakkatan satisfied Aaron's desire for information, too late to discuss the possibility of escape. That was deferred until the next night, with Hakkatan keeping carefully out of sight through the day. Then Aaron told him that for him to escape from Goshen was an

easy thing, because of his position as one of the Officers of Israel. He could walk openly through the land as far as the border, showing his badge of office to any suspicious Egyptian official. It was Hakkatan himself whose escape a second time needed care, but the little man was confident that his old tactics of hiding by day and travelling at night would carry him through.

Elisheba opposed the escape with all her strength. She was too stubborn to change her opinions easily, and her first fear of Hakkatan had gone too deep for easy banishing. She persisted in regarding his story as an invention, and that he was proposing escape solely in order to get Aaron into trouble. The two had agreed to meet at Etham, on the edge of the desert, and she was convinced that it was there that Hakkatan would betray her husband to the Egyptians.

Aaron refused to heed her dismal warnings. He was satisfied with Hakkatan's honesty, but even more was filled with a great yearning to see his long-lost brother. So they made their plans, and leaving the grief-stricken Elisheba moaning over one she already counted dead, the two set out on their great adventure. The escape was made still easier for them because at the moment Egypt was having trouble on her western borders and had rushed most of her troops to the threatened points, leaving the sun-tortured desert to be the efficient guardian of her eastern frontier.

They met again at the point just beyond Etham which Hakkatan has described so minutely that Aaron could not fail to find it, and together they turned south. Aaron now had need of all his faith in the man who had so suddenly come into his life, for half a day's journey after leaving the

fertile plains of Goshen made it very clear that he was utterly dependent upon Hakkatan. He knew nothing of desert travel, and the heat and aching glare was a revelation to him of what physical discomfort could be. But it was when they entered the wild gorges which led through the mountains that a feeling of awe almost amounting to terror entered his heart. A plainsman born and bred, the mountains were a thing incredible to him at first, so confusing him that he lost all sense of direction, and in their majestic immobility crushing his spirit and making him feel tiny and helpless.

Hakkatan had told him many times of his first journey through those wild mountain passes, and of his sufferings. Aaron's vivid imagination made him live those experiences himself, and there were many times when he secretly doubted the little man's assurance that there was no need for fear since now he knew the right way through, and where to find the precious water which meant life.

Full of his uneasy doubts, Aaron plodded along, his eyes fixed upon the rough, stone-strewn ground as he sought for an easy way for his bruised, aching feet, when a shout from Hakkatan brought him wide-eyed to a halt. At first he thought the little man had gone desert-mad, for he was leaping and shouting like one possessed, pointing at a towering wall which seemed to bar their further passage. When Hakkatan suddenly ran swiftly at that impassable wall, Aaron's fears were confirmed, and despair came to him as he realized that he was lost in the grim mountain range, with neither food nor water since Hakkatan had carried off their meagre supplies.

Straining eyes unused to the deceptive light of the desert,

Aaron watched the headlong flight of his companion. Then a feeling of ineffable relief swept over him as he saw beyond the flying form another moving object. He saw them meet, and a little later move again towards him. Realizing that Hakkatan had recognized one whom he knew, and evidently a friend, Aaron resumed his journey. Presently he could distinguish a form by the side of Hakkatan so gigantic that the little man seemed smaller than ever. Aaron's heart almost ceased to beat, and a strange weakness came upon him so that he was compelled to halt. Surely there could be no other man so big as that. It must be Moses. At last, after a long lifetime, they were to meet again!

He was still standing, leaning heavily on his staff, when Moses—with Hakkatan now far behind him—cried aloud:

"Aaron, my brother!"

His voice broke the strange spell, and with an inarticulate cry Aaron sprang forward and flung himself upon the mighty form he had not expected to meet in life, and kissed him with Oriental abandon. Then, their emotions having found partial outlet, they drew apart and looked long at each other. And now Aaron found that rumour had not lied, nor Hakkatan with all his passionate hero-worship exaggerated. Moses, this brother of his, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, was peerless in all the world. He gazed wonderingly at the great arms and massive chest, and found it easy to understand how one blow from the giant had killed even a powerful slave-driver. But his first rapturous appreciation of a mighty man was swiftly forgotten as he looked into his brother's face. Feature by feature his eyes lingered lovingly on this godlike brother. Just as the majestic mountains had

filled his soul with awe and the sense of his littleness, so now he found his soul moved to awe as he looked into the face of a man, and that man his own brother. He saw something of the mountain's serene quiet, the same unyielding strength, the same aloofness from all the mean, petty things of the world of ordinary men. Truly, he thought, Moses is indeed a prince with God and man!

Moses shared his deep emotion. He, too, looked into the face of one who amongst other men would be counted tall, though his own great height and girth made Aaron now look smaller than he was. Poor food, and little of it in his early years, had made Aaron grow tall and thin, yet Moses saw there was unusual strength in that spare form. But it was the face of Aaron which brought a deep sigh of satisfaction from Moses. He noted the high, noble head with its broad brow, and the large, expressive eyes which seemed to be curiously alive. Aaron wore the long beard of the Beni-Israel, but it did not hide the fine, sensitive mouth. Dignity and a high intelligence were there for all the world to see, and Moses remembered all he had heard of Aaron's golden tongue. So after many years of frustrated hopes the two brothers met, and each found the other fulfil his every wish.

Hakkatan now came up, leading an ass on which sat Moses's wife Zipporah, and by her walked the two straight-limbed sons of Moses, Gershom and Eliezer. Moses made his brother known to them, and then led the way to one of the many hidden springs which he had discovered in the years of his wanderings among the mountains. Here the party made their camp, and after they had eaten, Moses took Aaron aside and told him in detail of his experience upon the

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Mount of God, and of the signs which had been granted to confirm his own faith, and which were to convince both the Beni-Israel and Pharaoh that he was indeed the messenger of God.

Aaron looked at the long shepherd's crook which he had already observed Moses carried wherever he moved. It looked ordinary enough, but Aaron did not question his brother's word that by the power of God it had become a writhing snake . . . and would do so again when a sign was needed. He had come from Goshen already convinced that Moses was the destined Deliverer of Israel, and the tremendous, awe-inspiring personality of Moses had deepened that conviction to certainty. To one with his imaginative gifts the deliverance was already as good as effected.

Moses, however, possessed the practical mind of a great leader, and had no illusions of the vast difficulties which must be overcome in removing a multitude numbering at least a million men, women, and children from Egypt through desert country. His earlier military training had taught him the need for organizing food and water supplies for armies on the march. His problems would be made more difficult because he would be leading undisciplined people, without trained officers who would carry out his orders. Moreover, the tribes in Canaan would not peacefully vacate their land to let the hordes of the Beni-Israel take possession.

Aaron's easy optimism swiftly changed to uneasy doubts as Moses compelled him to think of these things. It had been so easy for him, and all the slaves, to cry for deliverance. Now he realized that he had never gone further in his thoughts than hoping that by some miracle Pharaoh's heart

might be softened and his word given that the Beni-Israel might leave Goshen. He had prayed for one miracle—the changing of Pharaoh. Now it seemed that he must look for a million miracles. So from exultant hopefulness he slumped to deep dejection.

His mobile, expressive face mirrored his thoughts, and in that first long talk Moses formed an accurate judgment of his brother. Aaron would be a great lieutenant, for his intelligence and imagination enabled him quickly to grasp a policy or visualize a plan of campaign when it was outlined to him. His ability to phrase his thoughts in clear, soul-moving words would make him an invaluable ally in winning the slave-hordes to obedience or inspiring them to combat. But Aaron would never be a leader. Unless there was some undiscovered genius among the slaves, Moses realized that he would have to carry upon his own broad shoulders the whole responsibility for doing all the thinking and planning. But he was not discouraged. He knew that he was being led of God, and that the needed wisdom would be given to him.

“The first thing we have to do,” he said, “is to make our people believe that God is going to deliver them from Egypt, and that I am called of God to lead them forth. They do not know me, and many may fear to trust one who is a stranger. A generation has grown up since I left Egypt, and not many of those I met in the few weeks when I searched for you and Miriam can now be alive. This is what we must do at once. You must go back to Goshen and gather together in secret all the Elders of the people and then introduce me to them. I am a man of slow speech, and could never fire the hearts of

men to brave suffering and death. That is the task to which God has called you, my brother. Men call you 'Aaron of the golden tongue,' and on the day when I meet the Elders of Israel your words must light the fire of liberty in their hearts so that they will be willing to follow me where I lead. But now that you have run away from Egypt, what will happen to you if you return? In the days when I was a prince of Egypt it would have meant death for you."

"That will be easy," replied Aaron. "Since you left, Pharaoh appointed many of us as officers, to stand between the Beni-Israel and the taskmasters. We are responsible for seeing that the daily quantity of work is done, and the new system has worked better than the old method of constant flogging. As officers of the people we have liberty to move about Goshen, so that even if it is known that I left the city of Rameses, the Egyptians will not ask many questions for some days."

"Did no one see you cross the border at Etham?" asked Moses, remembering the old rigid military discipline.

"No, for the garrison there is very small these days. The Libyans are threatening the western borders, and Pharaoh has sent a strong army there. The desert is a natural guard on the east, and the Philistines are in the service of Egypt."

"Where is Pharaoh, in Memphis or with his army?"

"He has been living in his palace at Tanis, north of the city of Rameses," said Aaron. "Many of the priests are there with him, and I think he will stay there a long time."

"Who are the leading priests now?" asked Moses. "They are the real power behind Pharaoh, and the men with whom we shall have to contend."

"Jannes is their leader, but he is now a very old man, and Jambres is better known in Egypt."

"Jannes still alive?" queried Moses thoughtfully. "That man always hated me, and our task would be easier if he were dead. He poisoned the mind of Rameses against me, and he will harden the heart of Merneptah. I begin to see now why the Lord our God told me that Pharaoh would not lightly let His people go, and that I must use His signs. Jannes was ever a great worker of miracles, and he will make his signs to strengthen Pharaoh. There are troubled days coming for Egypt, Aaron! But the first thing to be done is the gathering together of the Elders of Israel. We will travel to Goshen tomorrow, so that you may return home before Egypt becomes suspicious."

This they did, crossing the border at night. Once past the border garrison at Etham, Aaron walked openly in the day, but Moses and his party travelled during the night hours under the guidance of the cheerful Hakkatan, who led them safely to Aaron's hut. Elisheba took them in, her relief at the safe return of Aaron so great that she overcame her prejudice against Hakkatan and gave him a welcome which delighted the little man.

Aaron was not there. He had told his wife of the meeting with Moses, and that his brother's party would arrive shortly, and had then gone off to gather together the Elders. These were scattered all over Goshen, and it would take some days to get into touch with them all and arrange for the vital gathering. Ten days later he returned and told Moses that the following night most of the men who counted among the Beni-Israel would be waiting for them in a secret

place in the brick-fields where there would be no chance of an Egyptian spy's overhearing what was said.

His strong sense of the dramatic, which hitherto had found expression only in story-telling, led Aaron to choose both place and time. It influenced him also in what he told the Elders. None of them knew exactly why they were summoned to the gathering. Hints of portentous things about to happen, and vague promises that they should see such marvels as none had ever known, roused their curiosity and ensured their attendance, but not one of the hundred Elders who gathered in the deep hollow after dark had the least idea of what they were actually to see or hear. Moses had remained concealed in Aaron's hut through the days of waiting, lest any Egyptian should see his great form and denounce him.

The two brothers made their way to the appointed place under cover of the friendly darkness, but once arrived close to the hollow, Aaron gave the word to wait until the moon rose. Then, when its soft light was just beginning to dissipate the blackness, and vague outlines could be seen, he led Moses down into the hollow and placed him where he could see but not be seen. Circling round the group of waiting men he then approached them alone from the front and, taking his stand before them, began to speak.

Many times he had held audiences spellbound with his tales of fact or fancy, but never had he felt such a thrill as swept over him now. The sorrows of millions through more than two generations of injustice and cruelty had been born in him. The faith of a nation whose genius then, and since, has been for religion, inspired his soul. His passionate convic-

tion—that the brother, who in face and form satisfied his artist-soul as the ideal hero, was there to begin the movement for liberty—lifted him to the peak of the orator's art. As he spoke, his beautiful voice was used in all the artifices of modulation; now throbbing with emotion as he told of their woes, now rising harsh and strident as he denounced Egypt for her perfidy in enslaving the children of one who in time of grievous famine had stood between a nation and slow death; now ringing clear as a silver bell as he spoke of the mighty, changeless God who was on their side.

The swiftly rising moon, now at its splendid full, bathed the hollow with a lovely silver light long before he finished, and revealed every feature of the speaker's mobile face, and each restrained, expressive gesture. To Moses, sitting unseen behind the entranced Elders, it was a revelation of the mighty power of the spoken word. Aaron's pride in him was equalled by his own pride in the brother so highly gifted where he himself was so limited.

With the cunning of a born orator, and of one to whom time is a meaningless term, Aaron began his speech with Abraham, the father of them all. Step by step he took them with him along the chequered road trodden by the Beni-Israel, picturing them in peace and in strife, in luxury and in dire want, in freedom and in slavery. He reminded the old men, with their long memories, of the prophecy of Jannes: that one day a Deliverer should rise among the slaves whose coming would bring sorrow to Egypt, and how in his fear the great Rameses had ordered the death of every man-child among the slaves. With obvious pride in voice and looks, he told of the stratagem whereby his own mother Jochebed

had saved her son alive and got him into Pharaoh's own palace, to be brought up as a prince of Egypt, skilled in all their knowledge.

With the thought of Moses now in their minds, he told of the day when Egypt's prince threw away wealth and power in defence of a Hebrew slave, and fled into the desert. Then he told of things unknown to all—how God had come to Moses in Midian and spoken His word at last, sending His Deliverer to set His people free.

Now the long silence was broken. Little cries, not words so much as ejaculations, broke out everywhere, telling the practised speaker of surcharged emotions. The great moment had arrived for the climax, and so he cried:

"Moses, come forth!"

With long strides eating up the yards, Moses came round from behind the group, and a gasping sound like wind among the tree-tops told of the impression made by the sight of his mighty form towering above the spare figure of Aaron, and that face of almost unearthly beauty. It was a nation's wistful dream come true. A leader they could, and would, follow if need be to death.

In slow, deep tones Moses confirmed all that Aaron had said of his call to set the people free, and of the signs given to confirm his claim to speak for God, even as henceforth Aaron should speak for him. Then he handed to Aaron the great crook he carried, and his brother threw it on the ground, whereupon it changed into a wriggling snake with darting tongue and poison fangs erect.

Before the terrified Elders could do more than shrink involuntarily from that menacing figure of death, Aaron

stepped forward and repeated his brother's great act of faith—seized it by the tail . . . and the bewildered watchers looked again upon a harmless shepherd's crook!

Then at Moses's command, Aaron put his hand into the bosom of his loose robe, and when he drew it forth and held it up all men saw that it was white and scaly with the dreaded leprosy.

Again they shrank in terror from this man who in a moment had become as deadly as that writhing snake; whose mere presence close to them threatened each one with lingering death. But again at the command of his brother Aaron slipped that leprous hand into his robe, and drew it forth again whole.

The signs had removed any lingering doubts, and with one accord the Elders bowed themselves to the ground and worshipped the God who had heard their cry for release. Then, rising, they gathered eagerly round the man who was their incarnate hope, touching him as though to convince themselves that he was real and not a dream. Moses suffered them to have their way for a time, and answered their eager questions, but finally told them to go to their homes and spread the news among the Beni-Israel that the day of deliverance was at hand.

The presence of Moses in Goshen could no longer be kept secret now that a hundred Elders had not only seen him but were intoxicated with the heady thought of freedom. With the swiftness of fire among dry grass the great news swept through the land. Work-bowed slaves pulled themselves erect and walked again like men. Women caught their little children to their breasts and sobbed with joy at

the thought that these little ones would be saved from lifelong misery. In the uprush of hope the dry sobs of over-driven toilers were changed to songs, and the twinkling stars seemed to shine more brightly through amazement as the slaves threw off their long dejection and danced with joyous abandon before the Lord.

Only among the thousands of Egyptians dwelling in Goshen was there gloom. They saw in the riotous abandon the ominous signs of a slaves' revolt, and with guilty knowledge of brutal harshness through many years they feared the mobs they had so long despised. So with the first warnings of coming revolt many of the leading Egyptians hurried to Tanis to inform Pharaoh of an enemy in the midst more deadly than even the Libyans on the west.

This was exactly what Moses anticipated, and he had planned accordingly. Pharaoh would never let the people go while he thought them securely beneath his heel. Only when fear had corroded his soul, and he was convinced that it would be safer to let the Beni-Israel go than try to keep them, would he listen to the demand for liberty.

When he judged that rumour had done its work and that Pharaoh would be willing to give audience to one who spoke for a million people maddened with the memory of their wrongs, Moses set out for Tanis, accompanied by Aaron and all the Elders of Israel.

Those who travelled with him sang as they walked, sure that Pharaoh would speak the word of release. Moses alone walked in silence. God had warned him that Pharaoh would not lightly let the people go . . . and his ancient enemy Jannes was there to harden Pharaoh's heart. He was going

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to challenge the most powerful king in the world; challenge him in the name of Jehovah to do right. Already he knew that one who so long had done wrong would continue in evil. It would not be a conflict between Pharaoh of Egypt and Moses, the leader of a million slaves, but a conflict between Jehovah of Israel and the dark gods of Egypt . . . and who can tell what will happen in a conflict of gods?

But even Moses never guessed that the grim story of that mighty conflict would be the world's greatest epic, to be told in every generation until the last man leaves the world.

CHAPTER TEN

THE DEFEAT OF MOSES

"You say there has been no rioting," said Merneptah, Pharaoh of Egypt. "Have they robbed any of our people?"

"There has been no violence at all, O Pharaoh," replied Harsiesi, chief of the taskmasters. "It is simply that they refuse to work. They have gathered into Pithom and Ramesses in vast numbers, like the very sand of the desert for numbers, and they sing all day. It seems that they are bewitched by some great magic, and before it my men are helpless. They no longer fear the whip. It is my men who are afraid these days. Whenever a man of Egypt comes out of his house, a number of these Hebrew dogs gather round him and go wherever he goes. They do not lay hands upon us . . . yet. But they look as though it needed only a word and they would pull my men to pieces with their bare hands. There is a spirit abroad among the Beni-Israel which makes them seem almost like men, not slaves."

"It is the accursed Libyans," said Pharaoh, his face dark with rage. "While they hold my armies on the border, they have raised the slaves against us in Goshen. Their spies must have been among the slaves for many months, for it takes time to put courage into the hearts of slaves. How is it that you have not reported to me the presence of Libyans in Goshen, Harsiesi?"

"It is not the Libyans, but one of the Beni-Israel," said Harsiesi diffidently. "I heard them singing that their God had appeared to one called Moses in Midian and sent him to be their Deliverer."

"What is this Moses like?" said a harsh, menacing voice.

Forgetting even Pharaoh, Harsiesi swung round to face an old man whose skin hung on his tall, thin frame like wrinkled parchment. His shaven head and beardless face, and robes of spotless white linen, proclaimed him a priest. Harsiesi had recognized him the moment he entered the council to which he had been summoned. Jannes had been the High Priest of Egypt for more years than Harsiesi had lived, and all men knew that he was the real power behind the throne. The chief of the taskmasters feared him more than he feared Pharaoh, for while Pharaoh in his wrath might kill him, Jannes had the power to torment his soul for ever. So now when he saw the blazing eyes glaring at him from the priest's shrivelled face, and heard the rage in his voice, he trembled visibly.

"I have not seen him," he stammered, "but I hear that he is a giant among men, with a face about which many songs are being sung."

"It is the same man," said Jannes curtly, turning to Pharaoh. "This man can go now. His fear of the slaves made him wise. If he had ordered his men to flog any of them, we should have had them howling round us by now. Tell him to keep his men away from the slaves. I will deal with this Moses."

He gave his orders to Pharaoh with the assurance of one conscious of his power. Yet there was no insolence in either

voice or looks. Pharaoh saw that the priest was profoundly moved, and only speaking his thoughts aloud. He therefore dismissed the relieved Harsiesi, who hurriedly prostrated himself before him and scrambled out of the council chamber backwards. As soon as he had gone, Jannes said:

"The Libyans have nothing to do with this rising of the slaves, O Pharaoh. It is the day I have waited for through many years. I warned Rameses that one day a Hebrew would rise and work great evil to Egypt, and urged him to kill all the men-children of the slaves. If he had heeded my warning, we should not now be facing a worse peril than the Libyans. This is the man whom the Princess Merris saved from the river and brought up as her son. Against my will he was made a priest of Osiris, and instructed in all our wisdom. By the magic he learned in Egypt he has bewitched the slaves so that they no longer work. I hoped he was dead. I tell you, Pharaoh, that I fear this man. I, Jannes, who have never before feared any man!"

"I have heard of this Moses," said Pharaoh scornfully. "He killed a taskmaster, and ran away. He may be a big man, but like all the Beni-Israel he has the soul of a dog."

"He did not run because he had killed an Egyptian," said Jannes. "Moses knows no fear. He fled, because he knew that at last I had turned the heart of Rameses against him, and knew that if he died—and death was very near to him then—he could not help the Hebrews. He knows that, but for me, he might now be wearing the double crown of Egypt and be seated upon Pharaoh's throne. When he saved Egypt from the Ethiopians, the people hailed him as a god . . . and so Rameses feared him, and listened to me at last."

The powerful priest had never before spoken so plainly, and Merneptah's face revealed the passionate anger in his heart. He could no longer think of Moses as simply the leader of a slaves' revolt, but as one who might even now become a rival. It seemed more than probable that this rousing of the slaves to successful passive resistance was only the beginning of a plot to use the preoccupation of Egypt with Libya to seize the throne. With the stubbornness of a weak man, he refused to heed the priest.

"I will deal with him," he stormed. "I will send men from my own guard to seize him and bring him here, and then he will wish that he had died in the days of Rameses, for death shall not come easily to him now."

Jannes said no more, but sat with his head on his chest staring fixedly into space as though looking at things to come. He knew Merneptah better than Pharaoh knew himself. He had played deliberately upon Merneptah's vanity when speaking about Moses as a possible Pharaoh, and for the moment was content to let Pharaoh have his way. If outraged pride and fear of a rival led Merneptah to seize and kill Moses, Jannes would be more than satisfied. But though he welcomed the thought, Jannes had little faith that Merneptah would succeed. In his vision, long years ago, he had seen much evil come upon Egypt through one of the Beni-Israel, and he believed that vision would come true. Pharaoh could try his plan, but when that failed, he would use his dark magic to overthrow the man whom he had once hated so greatly, and who had reappeared to trouble him.

Merneptah sent no soldiers to seize Moses. Before he could give the order to his private guards, a man was brought to

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him with a tale that a big company of the Beni-Israel was approaching Tanis, and with them one who seemed like one of the gods come to earth. The number was given at about a hundred, and the smallness of the force puzzled Merneptah, whose fears had caused him to anticipate tens of thousands. How could Moses win a throne with a force fewer than the palace guards?

Moses, however, was not thinking of thrones. As he strode ahead of the Hebrew Elders, his mind was restlessly considering the problem which had puzzled him for many days . . . the problem of food. If Pharaoh could be persuaded to let the slaves go free—and Moses felt that nothing less than the intervention of God could effect that miracle of a changed heart—how was he to find food for a million people through many days? If he led them to Canaan by the short route, the way of the Philistines, it would take at least a week. The quantity of food and water for such a multitude must be enormous. Unless he could solve the food problem, he would simply lead his people out to meet a terrible death in the desert . . . if Pharaoh let them go.

Following the habit formed in the quiet years in Midian, he prayed about his problem even as he walked towards Pharaoh; pleading with terrible earnestness to God to reveal the answer to his problem. And as he prayed, a thought came to him which seemed to meet the urgent need. The more he thought it over, the more sure he was that at last he had the answer. He did not take credit to himself for thinking out the solution. He had been beaten, and in desperation had sought the answer from God. The idea came after he prayed—and to the simple faith of Moses that meant only

one thing: God had spoken to him, putting the thought into his mind.

He would demand of Pharaoh that he let the Beni-Israel go out into the wilderness for three days to sacrifice to their God, lest He visit both the Hebrews and Egypt with His anger!

Pharaoh would surely listen to such a plea, for the Egyptians feared the gods, and such sacrifices were ordinary events. He would not suspect that there was any other motive than a great sacrifice, and so would not forbid the slaves taking with them the tens of thousands of sheep and goats and bulls to be slain upon the altars to appease their God.

These great herds of cattle really belonged to the Beni-Israel. They were the natural increase of the animals brought into Goshen by Jacob and his sons when Goshen was given to them in recognition of Joseph's service in saving Egypt from famine. Rameses had confiscated them when he enslaved the Beni-Israel. Since the Egyptians knew little about cattle-breeding, he had compelled the slaves to tend their own herds, but for the benefit of Egypt.

To take the cattle, therefore, would be only to take their own, which satisfied Moses's sense of justice. But though he proposed to tell Pharaoh that they were to be offered as sacrifices he did not intend to offer them as burnt-offerings to Jehovah. They should be the food supplies for the great multitude. It seemed to his logical mind that there could be no truer sacrifice to Israel's God than to use the animals as food for Jehovah's people, thus bringing the Beni-Israel through the barren wilderness to the edge of Canaan. Then, with food supplies running short, the men of Israel would

not fear the tribes of Canaan. With death from hunger lying behind them in the wilderness, and food as well as land lying before them in Canaan, it would not need the oratory of Aaron to inspire even slaves with courage. The urge to live, that mightiest of all instincts, would be on his side to help him overcome the Canaanites.

As the plan developed in detail in the mind of Moses, the shadows cleared from his face, and in his heart he sang a song of praise to the God who had so clearly revealed His will to His servant. It never crossed his mind that the plan was deceitful, and that he was going to Pharaoh with a lie upon his lips, spoken in the name of Jehovah. Standards of truth and honour have grown very slowly among men through the centuries, and in the days of Moses the accepted law was to deal with your neighbour as he dealt with you; quite literally to exact "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." The Egyptians had dealt treacherously with Israel. Now cunning should be met by cunning, and Israel escape by deceit from treacherous Egypt.

So it was with an easy mind and a high heart that Moses demanded an audience of Pharaoh when he reached Tanis. Not for the first time, a man's subconscious thoughts seemed to him an answer to his prayers . . . but Moses was soon to learn that the ways of men are not the ways of God, and that He is not the Father of lies but the God of truth. His own standards of conduct were to be raised as he learned in the hard school of bitter experience.

Reassured by the smallness of the embassy of the slaves, Pharaoh received Moses and Aaron in the council chamber, and with him were Jannes, Jambres, and a number of other

priests and palace guards. Merneptah looked eagerly at Moses when he entered, and a bitter personal enmity was born in his heart at the first glance. Merneptah was the result of the close intermarriages of the Egyptian royal family; tall and thin and physically feeble. His pale olive face had the regular features of an Egyptian aristocrat, but he looked what he was—a highly strung man with nerves stretched almost to the breaking-point, violently emotional, and because of his despotic powers unused to placing any check upon his passions.

In Moses he saw his opposite. Looking at the Hebrew leader's mighty form and perfect face, with its strangely serene expression, Merneptah was made conscious of a hitherto unknown sensation of inferiority. Physically, mentally, and in every way, he felt that Moses was his master . . . and all the pride of the most powerful monarch in the world was instantly up in arms against this man who was by birth a despised slave.

Jannes leaned forward as eagerly as Merneptah, and from his thin lips there came a long-drawn sigh. Though Moses now wore the square, long beard of the Hebrews instead of the short, pointed beard of the Egyptian aristocrats, Jannes recognized him immediately. This was indeed the son of Princess Merriis, against whom he had vainly warned Ramesses.

The same man, yet somehow different. Jannes felt that the years which had weakened him had only added to the strength of Moses. In the past he had secretly despised the man whom all others idolized. Moses then had been just a fighting-man, a man of beef and brawn who could win

battles by reckless courage, but his intellectual inferior. With the age-old belief, and proof in practice, of the priests of the world that brain will always rule brawn, Jannes had scorned the gigantic Moses. Now he had to revise in a moment all his former judgments. Looking at that splendid brow and the calm, fine eyes, Jannes recognized a man who had learned to think deeply. Because of his early vision of a slaves' revolt the priest had instinctively feared the leader of the slaves: now that he looked upon the man, Jannes feared him for himself.

After that first long, searching look, Jannes glanced at Pharaoh and sighed with satisfaction. Merneptah's rage-filled eyes, and pouting under-lip contorting his features into a bitter sneer told the watchful priest of the storm of jealous rage within the heart of Pharaoh. He knew, somehow, that Moses had come to ask a favour of Pharaoh. He also knew that, whatever it was, Pharaoh would never grant it.

In that first clash of opposing personalities no one had paid attention to Aaron. Yet his was the first voice to break the strained silence within the council chamber as he said:

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.'"

Like a spark falling among dry grass, to cause an instant flame of fire, so the mellifluous accents of Aaron's exquisite voice exploded Pharaoh's rage. Rising to his feet and with icy contempt in face and voice he cried:

"Who is the Lord, that I should hearken to His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let the people go!"

A horrified gasp, almost instantly suppressed, came from

the priests and palace guards. Such insulting speech about the gods was against the customs. Wise men treated with respect all gods, even those of their enemies, for who could tell what vengeance would be taken by an offended deity? The Beni-Israel might safely be despised as slaves, and called dogs and every other insulting name men could invent, since long years of oppression had crushed their spirit and made them cringe before the arrogance of Egypt. But it was another matter altogether to speak slightly against their God. Pharaoh had challenged this unknown God, and even Egypt's priests wriggled uncomfortably in their seats at his bold words.

Jannes alone could have told why Pharaoh thus broke the ancient customs. He had roused Merneptah's jealousy against Moses in the first instance, and Pharaoh's face had revealed to a lifelong student of men the effect of Moses's strong nature upon the spoilt, little-minded potentate. Jealousy and spite had lifted Pharaoh for the moment above fear. Jannes chuckled inwardly, for it would be an easy thing for him in the future to play upon the fears which time would surely bring to Merneptah.

Moses utterly failed to understand the situation. With the innate humility of a truly great man, he was wholly unaware of the impression he made upon others. Knowing the superstitious fears of the Egyptians so well, he had been positive that an appeal in the name of God for permission to sacrifice would be granted. On it depended his plan for finding the food supplies for the flight from Egypt, and he could not see his cherished plan, which he believed to be inspired by God, fail without making a further effort. Forgetting

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his slowness of speech in the intensity of his desires, he said urgently:

"The God of the Hebrews has met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days into the wilderness and sacrifice unto the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

It was a tactful speech which ought to have succeeded, and might have done so if Pharaoh had not been so full of unreasoning jealousy of the speaker. Moses had not roused the wrath of the Egyptians by any threat of his God visiting them with His anger. He had appealed solely to Egyptian shrewdness. If the slaves died of sickness or sword, Egypt would lose her free labour.

The deep, ringing voice of the man he hated, so unlike his own high-pitched, strident voice, added fuel to the fire of Pharaoh's rage. His face turned livid as he screamed:

"Who are you, Moses and Aaron, to loose the people from their labours? Get to your burdens!"

The mean soul of the king found vicious pleasure in addressing as a slave the man whose personality affected him so strangely, and Moses left him to enjoy his petty triumph. It was useless to attempt further persuasion, and so he signed to Aaron to accompany him from the council chamber.

When they had gone Merneptah sat down again, biting his fingers as he sought a way by which he could further humiliate Moses. No one dared to interrupt his thoughts, and Jannes did not wish to do so. He knew that Pharaoh's spite would find expression in something which would make the way of Moses still harder. At last Merneptah's face cleared a little and he said curtly:

"Send for Harsiesi."

The chief of the taskmasters was still in Tanis, and in a little while he hurried into the presence of Pharaoh.

"Until now you have given the people straw with which to bind the clay into bricks. Give them no more. Let them find it for themselves. They have had too easy a time; see to it, Harsiesi, that they keep up the tale of bricks. Let but a single brick be short and you will answer for it to me!"

Harsiesi quaked inwardly before the menace in Pharaoh's voice. In the madness of his rage Merneptah was asking for an impossible thing. If the Beni-Israel were to find their own straw for the brick-making it meant that they must range all over the land, picking up such stubble as they could find. They would have to walk miles in the nights, going without food or rest in order to get ready for the next day's toil. The result could only be rapidly increasing physical weakness, which would slow up the work in the brick-fields. Yet the tale of bricks must be kept up! As he went from the palace to call the taskmasters together and give them the unreasonable order, Harsiesi fingered his neck reflectively. His head felt loose on his shoulders, knowing Pharaoh's ways with those who displeased him.

His personal fear roughened his voice as he repeated the savage order to the company of thick-necked, brutal men who were under him. One of them ventured to put into words the thoughts which were in the minds of all, and said that it would be impossible to keep up the supply of bricks under such circumstances.

"Pharaoh has ordered it, and it is for you to carry out his orders," he snarled. "Wear out your whips and you shall

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have fresh whips given to you. Go into the huts and drive out the old men and women, and children also, and let them search the land for straw during the days. If they cannot find straw, see that they make bricks without it . . . but keep up the tally, or we shall suffer as well as the slaves. If they die of the labour, let them die, until Pharaoh sees that he has asked more than men and women can do."

Harsiesi's fears infected the rest of the taskmasters, and in their new treatment of the slaves they proved that bullies are essentially cowardly. Afraid for themselves, they began a campaign of terror among the slaves. All through the long, hot days, and far into the nights, they drove the slaves unceasingly. The shrill whistling and sharp crack of pliant whips was heard everywhere, mingled with the cries and sobs of men and women.

In one day the songs of the slaves came to an abrupt end. Goshen became a land of lamentation and bitter mourning. Angry weals showed on every body, which soon turned to ugly open wounds on those who were physically weak and unable to maintain the pace set by Harsiesi. Hastily prepared food hurriedly eaten by people too exhausted to digest it resulted in high fevers or utter collapse. When some of the slaves failed to join their gangs, the men in charge of them went to the sufferers' huts and drove them forth with blows and curses, lashing them until they died upon their feet. Soon the vultures in Goshen were too heavy to fly. Gorged with the victims of a mean king's spite they rested upon the crimson sand.

But flog and curse as they would, Harsiesi's men found the task beyond their powers. Slowly at first, and then with

increasing rapidity, the tally fell short. In his fear for his own life Harsiesi made his men gather the Elders of Israel and bring them to him. Hitherto they had been spared both labour and flogging. Now they shared the lot of the rest. Old men, as many of them were, they were cruelly beaten while Harsiesi cursed them savagely for letting the production fall.

Moses and Aaron alone were spared. The report of his having killed a slave-driver was revived about Moses, and when they saw his mighty form even the most brutal of the slave-drivers could not pluck up courage to do more than curse him vilely. Because he was his brother, Aaron shared the immunity of Moses.

But if his body was spared the biting sting of the lash, the soul of Moses suffered agonies during the nightmare week. He had come from Midian positive that he was going to deliver his people from bondage, and the sole result of his intervention was to add to their misery a hundredfold. The most he could do was to use his great strength in carrying loads of the heavy Nile clay to those who were more skilled than he in the actual making of bricks, and try by cheery words to keep up the hearts of his people. But the strenuous labours of even the most powerful of men were imperceptible in lightening the lot of so many, nor could his words carry any conviction against the hard logic of facts. He urged those with whom he talked to have faith in God, that He would deliver them. Before that tragic week ended, they ceased to answer him, too numbed with weariness and misery for speech.

The impossible conditions could not continue indefinitely.

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The tenuous Nile clay made good enough bricks, but it needed chopped straw to hold it together. Without the straw the bricks were friable and brittle, breaking or crumbling as they were stacked, and therefore reducing the daily tally to such an extent that Harsiesi was reduced to despair. The stubble from the harvest fields within miles of the slaves' quarters had been cleared to the last small fragment, and the miserable slaves could find no more even though half the nights were spent in fruitless wanderings. The moon was on the wane, and to search the fields in the darkness of an Egyptian night was wasted effort.

Despair put courage into the hearts of the Hebrew Elders. Their first savage flogging was only a promise of further brutal treatment unless conditions were changed immediately, and so with the courage of desperation they marched in a body to Tanis and prayed for an audience with Pharaoh.

Merneptah received them, but it was apparent from the first moment that he was in no mood to make concessions. Fear and jealousy working on a weak nature were rapidly destroying the kindlier, more human side of his nature. Waking or sleeping, he could not forget his bold challenge to the God of the Hebrews, and his superstitious dread of unknown gods caused him to waken drenched with sweat from terrible nightmares. In his waking hours he could not forget that in spite of years of oppression the Beni-Israel had increased far more rapidly than the Egyptians, for all their leisured lives and abundant food.

That was the fact, and it seemed unnatural. Starved, beaten, under-fed, the Beni-Israel ought to have diminished. That they did not, but continued to increase, argued some

power at work beyond human understanding. To Pharaoh, as to all primitive minds, there was only one explanation. Nations are made strong or weak, increase or diminish, according to the power of their gods. He knew nothing of Jehovah of Israel, nor did any of his priests, but it seemed obvious that He was a great God.

Merneptah had challenged Him, and the present inhuman treatment of the slaves was directed more against their God than against them. What would He do to the man who had so insulted Him? Pharaoh's nightmares suggested terrible things, and fear urged him to send for Moses and try to make his peace with this unknown God.

But the stubborn pride of a weak man kept him from yielding to his fear. If the mouthpiece of Jehovah had been any other than Moses, the heroic figure who so perfectly fulfilled the age-old dream of all that a king should be, Merneptah would have stifled his jealousy. But to send for the man he had contemptuously addressed as a slave and plead with him to intercede with Jehovah was an impossibility. So he hardened his heart, and trampled upon his fears.

The Elders of Israel knew nothing of the warring emotions within the heart of Pharaoh. With heads bowed in humility they made their plea for straw to be given again to the Beni-Israel, asking in honest bewilderment:

"Why have you dealt thus with your servants? There is no straw given to us, and yet your officers say, 'Make bricks,' and we are beaten . . . but the fault is with your own people."

Pharaoh's rage made him incoherent. With his livid face working he mouthed at them, swinging his lean arms at the

dejected group as though he would work some physical violence upon them with his bare hands.

"You are idle . . . you are idle," he stammered. "So you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Go and *work*! No straw shall be given to you, but you shall deliver the full tale of bricks."

At a sign from the infuriated king the guards drove the Elders from the council chamber, and hag-ridden by despair they plodded back along the road to Goshen. Not far from Tanis they met Moses and Aaron, who had heard of the mission of the Elders and hurried to overtake them to take their part in the appeal to Pharaoh. In their hopeless misery the Elders turned against the man who was the cause of it.

They were not violent, and their very restraint made their words the more effective. Shrill invectives and bitter imprecations are so much a part of Oriental emotional life that Moses would have understood a torrent of abuse and wild gestures. Instead, the old men looked at him in silence for a long minute, and then the oldest of them all said in quiet, heavy tones:

"The Lord look upon you, and judge! You are responsible for all our misery, for until you came with your lying words that God had sent you to lead us forth from Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey, life was possible for us, though hard. Now you have made us to be an offence in the eyes of Pharaoh and all his people, and when you asked him to let us go and sacrifice to the Lord you put a sword into his hand with which he will destroy us altogether."

Without another word they drew their shabby rags about them, as though contaminated by the mere presence of

Moses, and went on their way to continue the impossible until merciful death ended the miseries of the Beni-Israel.

The big man watched them go, and in that moment he knew such suffering as he had not thought a man might know and still live on. Those bitter, quietly spoken words were true. By his interference he had sentenced his nation to lingering death. When Pharaoh had first given his savage order to withhold the straw, it had not been apparent to Moses that it really meant a sentence of death upon the people he loved. He had known it would add to their labours, but no more than that.

Now he knew. He had watched men reeling home at dawn, overcome with exhaustion at the very beginning of a day of terrible labour. His own strong hands had lifted the bodies of women who had dropped dead under their monstrous loads, his heart wrung within him as he saw the marks of the whips upon their shrivelled forms. He had heard the pitiful sobbing of tiny children as they staggered along the sandy tracks, starved, yet too frightened of the cracking whips to cease their endless task of looking for wisps of straw or dried grass. A thousand times a day he had seen what it meant to order a nation of slaves to make bricks without straw, yet not to diminish the tale of daily production. He had spoken in the name of God, and this was the result . . . mass-murder.

Between his tortured eyes and the slowly retreating forms of the unhappy Elders there came a series of visions of all he had seen in that dreadful week, and he groaned aloud. Then, like one driven by devils, he turned and fled far out into the wastes which fringed the fertile valley. Flinging his

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great form upon the sand, he rocked from side to side in anguish of soul, with eyes shut tight in a vain effort to keep from seeing those awful pictures of man's cruelty to man.

Gradually the violence of the paroxysm passed, and for a while he lay inert. Then he began to think, but this time not of the appalling woes of Israel. His deeply religious nature was fighting to keep his hold on God. Scene by scene he went over the quiet years in Midian, in which God had first become known to him, and even more real with the passing years. In Midian, and especially upon the sacred mountain, he had been *sure* of God. No man had tricked him, either by the cunning of speech or by deceitful signs professedly miraculous. There had been no dim-lighted, stately temple to create within a credulous heart a false sense of the nearness of God.

There had been many quiet talks with Jethro under the cold light of twinkling stars, talks in which a man of whose innate goodness he was positive told him of all that God meant to him day by day. But there had been far more times when not even Jethro was there . . . long days under blazing suns when he sat in the shade of a rock and communed heart and heart with God. His culminating vision and his call to deliver the slaves had come upon a bare mountain-side in the white light of noon. There had been no trickery about it. So far as a man can be sure of anything, he could be sure that it was God who had revealed Himself and His will. It was not his own secret desires misleading him, causing him to mistake desire for a call, for he had been unwilling to respond and even dared to argue with God.

Lying there upon the hot sands of the desert, Moses felt again all his old conviction that God had sent him to deliver

the slaves . . . and that for some inscrutable reason God, at the last moment, had changed His mind.

Kneeling upon the sand, and with his drawn face turned upwards, Moses spoke to the God in whom he still believed but whose ways bewildered him:

"Lord, why hast Thou evil entreated this people? Why is it that Thou didst send me? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name he has evil entreated the people, neither has he let them go."

His thoughts were confused and contradictory. Almost in the same breath he charged both Pharaoh and God with responsibility for the cruelty which was destroying the Beni-Israel and breaking his own heart. But that confusion of thought was part of the heavy burden borne by deeply religious men in the world's slow understanding of God. It was also the proof that the heart can apprehend more than the mind can fully comprehend. To Moses, as to all men in the twilight of religious experience, it seemed an impossible thing that even the most powerful king in the world could act against the will of God. Long centuries had to elapse before men understood that God cannot override the freedom of the human will without destroying human personality, so that if a wicked king uses his power for cruelty even God cannot alter that evil choice. Pharaoh must *let* the people go, of his own free will, or he would cease to be a man.

Since he was a man of his own age, Moses could not realize this. He could not think of Pharaoh as able to resist the will of God, and to him it seemed as though God himself had hardened the heart of the king, and thus caused the added

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misery to Israel. Yet even so his faith held on to God, in spite of reason and all his agony of heart, and his prayer was no more than that God would reveal to him the reason for His strange acts.

And God answered his faith. As clear to Moses as though spoken by an audible voice there came the swift response:

"Now shalt thou see what I will do with Pharaoh! He will do more than let the people go: he will *drive* them out of the land in his haste to be rid of them."

Because of the limitations of his knowledge Moses again missed the full significance of that promise. He did not perceive that there was to be no overpowering of the will of Pharaoh, but such happenings as would lead the king of his own will to get rid of the slaves. He thought that through some mighty act God would prove His power and lead the people forth.

The burden therefore was lifted from his soul, and with hope again singing its song within him he rose to his feet and hurried back to meet the Elders of Israel.

They came in response to the messages he sent; a despondent group of pain-racked men convinced that they were abandoned by their God and deceived by the big man who had declared he spoke in His name.

Out of the fullness of his own revived faith Moses blundered again. Just as he had let his own hard thinking over the problem of food supplies in the wilderness lead him to believe that the sacrifice-trick was the will of God, and failed to use the signs which had been given to him, so now in his certainty that deliverance was about to come he forgot that Aaron was to be the mouthpiece of God.

THE DEFEAT OF MOSES

In his eagerness to impart his own new confidence Moses addressed the Elders himself, stating in blunt, simple language God's repeated promise to him. He failed to thrill a single heart, and the leaders of his nation looked at him with smouldering eyes as an enemy. The genius of Aaron would have succeeded, for by his eloquence and instinctive understanding of men's minds the golden-tongued orator of Israel would have charmed them by the magic of words from brooding over their hard lot, as he had done before. But as Moses spoke to them in the brief, clipped sentences of a soldier more used to the giving of orders than playing upon the emotions of his hearers, "they hearkened not unto him for anguish of spirit, and for bitterness of bondage."

The meeting broke up in angry disorder, and some of the dejection of the Elders crept again into the heart of Moses. But as he walked with Aaron to the hut they shared, he went over the causes of his failure with the mind trained to look for the causes of defeat as well as plan for success, and he realized that he ought to have let his brother fulfil the task to which God had called him. In his eagerness he had tried to do everything himself; now he saw that God does not entrust to a single servant all His purposes.

It was another lesson learned in the hard school of experience, but it was learned. Henceforth Moses never usurped the functions of his brother, and placed a truer value upon the gifts of another when those gifts were wholly unlike his own.

With his lessons now learned Moses was ready for his task. Pharaoh's stubborn will was to be influenced by strange and terrible happenings until it yielded to the will of God.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TERRIBLE YEAR

There was almost as much misery in Merneptah's great palace in Tanis as there was among the slaves in Goshen. Ever since the day when Moses made his first polite request that Pharaoh should permit the Beni-Israel to go and sacrifice to their God, a change had come over Pharaoh. Freemen and palace slaves alike avoided him if possible. When summoned into the royal presence, they went with inward quaking, and much searching of consciences for tasks unfulfilled. The only certain thing these days about the despot who held the lives of all his subjects in his thin hands was the evilness of his temper.

His face told the story of some devastating power at work within him. Dark, burning eyes glowered out of the pale olive-tinted face which had become lined and gaunt within a month. The old arrogant calm of one supremely sure of himself, since no one dared question his least word, had given place to restless movements and a twitching of his thin features. He looked like a man burning up with fever. So the many palace doctors thought, and each treated him along the lines of which he specialized. And each and all had failed to effect a cure.

Pharaoh's sickness was of the mind, and only one man in the palace knew the truth of his complaint. Though shriv-

elled with age, the High Priest Jannes had the wisdom of many years, and he had seen the beginnings of that jealousy which was eating out the heart of Pharaoh and making him a ruthless tyrant.

Jannes knew the real trouble, but Jannes would not try to cure the king for all the wealth of Egypt. Instead, with devilish ingenuity he heaped fuel upon the fire of jealousy. For if Merneptah was jealous of the mighty body and handsome features of Moses, Jannes feared something within the Hebrew leader which he had never sensed in any other man. Pharaoh saw in Moses a possible rival to his throne: Jannes saw in him one who might easily ruin all Egypt and bring down his withered head to the dust in shame. So he played upon the king's jealousy with sly hints and subtle suggestions a hundred times a day until Pharaoh was almost beside himself. With cold deliberation he was trying to work Merneptah to the point of frenzy when he would give the order which should mean swift death to Moses.

With all his evil soul Merneptah lusted to give that order, but somehow he could not force the words to come. Again and again he opened his thin lips to speak the fatal words, with Jannes peering at him eagerly through the drooping lids which made him so closely resemble a vulture, and each time the order strangled in his throat.

What was one man's life to him? Nothing, and less than nothing. Many a slave had been beaten to death or beheaded for nothing worse than slowness to carry out a mumbled command. And Moses was only a dog of a slave! Merneptah said so to himself over and over again as he fought against this strange inhibition. Why could he not give the order?

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A hundred men would run like jackals to carry it out, and no matter where Moses might hide his great form they would ferret him out . . . and bring back that peerless head for Pharaoh to see that his order had been carried out. Waking or sleeping, the wonderful face of Moses was always before his eyes, mocking him, goading him . . . terrifying him.

Deep within his soul Merneptah knew what was the real cause of his inability to speak the word of death. He was afraid of Moses, with the fear which is of the soul. It was not fear of his tremendous strength, nor fear that he could lead a successful revolt of the slaves. His palace guards, ebony giants from Nubia, at his word would overpower even Moses. No man in the world can withstand a score who know that failure to kill means death for themselves. And Pharaoh had ceased to fear the slaves' revolt. Surprise had been their one hope, while the armies of Egypt were facing the forces of Libya. Now Pharaoh had sufficient chariots policing Goshen to prevent any further sudden rising.

His fear was of the man himself, superstitious in its origin. He feared Moses in exactly the same way that he feared the gods of Egypt. In the one brief interview, when that jealous hate sprang full-grown into the heart of Pharaoh, he had addressed Moses as a slave, and had spoken scornfully about Moses's God. Jealousy made him very bold that day, but he had swiftly fallen from those heights of fearless rage. Now in secret he trembled at the memory of his bold challenge, and by some queer working of his poisoned mind he had come to identify Moses with his God. Never in any gust of rage, so frequent with the neurotic, overstrung king, would Pharaoh dream of ordering the death of a god! The very

thought was too impossible for even a crazy mind to entertain. And Moses had become as a god to him. So, though with all his little, evil heart Merneptah lusted to destroy his enemy, Moses alone in Egypt was in no danger at Pharaoh's hand.

Jannes, the powerful High Priest, hated Moses with even greater intensity, for his was the cumulative hate of many years, and equally superstitious in its origin.

Merneptah's bold challenge had given Jannes infinite pleasure, but had not inspired him with any real confidence in the king. Better than any one, he knew Pharaoh's weak nature and superstitious dread of unknown gods. The shrewd eyes watching under their hooded lids had seen the many struggles between desire and dread, Pharaoh's lust to kill and his fear of the consequences. To end the menace of Moses he must first end Pharaoh's fear of him, and inside his shrivelled head the astute brain of Jannes was plotting ceaselessly.

He decided finally that there was only one way by which this could be done. To convince Pharaoh that Jannes and the gods of Egypt were more powerful than Moses and the God of the Hebrews was something which could not be done by words alone. There must be signs, the working of wonders so convincing that doubt would be impossible. Pharaoh's superstitious fear of Moses must be overborne by an even greater dread of Egypt's gods.

Jannes had no hesitancy in deciding upon a test of magic, for Egypt was the home of mystery. She was the first land to introduce the vogue of the specialist. Acting on the assumption that no one man could master all knowledge, each

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individual was compelled to specialize on one particular subject until he became a master of it. Thus in her vast medical service no doctor acted as a general practitioner, dealing with any of a score of complaints. Each doctor studied one particular disease, or one part of the body only.

This system of specialization now played into the hands of Jannes. He knew that Moses had once been a priest of Osiris, and as such had therefore learned some of the secret magic of Egypt. But there were other secrets known only to the priests of Anubis, of Set, or Horus, or a score of other gods, and of those mysteries Moses must be ignorant. Jannes could therefore call upon Moses to work such wonders as he knew, and then confound him by calling upon a score of priests to work their own specialized magic.

Conjuring of an extraordinarily clever kind was the true explanation of nearly all their wonders, but not of all. Egypt's priests were the first to discover the strange power of the human eye to suggest to observers things which had no real origin in substance. They could hypnotize not only individuals but large numbers of people at the same time, and by mass-suggestion had established their reputations as workers of genuine miracles. Jannes was convinced that Moses could not have this power, and that he could convince Pharaoh in spite of his dread.

He therefore went to Merneptah and urged him to send for Moses, to demand of him a sign that he really spoke in the name of Jehovah, pledging his word that he would repeat any sign performed by the Hebrew leader, and then do still greater wonders.

The idea appealed immediately to Merneptah, for super-

stition ever delights in mysteries. He sent his messengers to Goshen with orders to find out Moses and summon him to come at once to Tanis. As Moses was not hiding, but moving openly among the slaves in his ceaseless task of trying to keep up their faith in God, they soon found him. Accompanied by Aaron alone, Moses set off for Tanis, and the next day was shown into Pharaoh's council chamber, where Merneptah and dozens of the priests were awaiting him.

Merneptah had schooled himself for the meeting, trying desperately to overcome his fears. But one look at Moses brought back the chill of dread within his soul. In spite of his agitation he could sense a change in this man who was his master. On his former visit Moses had spoken to Pharaoh, using courteous language in a conciliatory spirit. He had come then to try to persuade Pharaoh to let the people go. This time it was evident he came in a very different spirit. His face was set in lines of implacable sternness as he looked from his great height down upon the despot whose commands had caused such suffering to the slaves. Nor did he salute the king on entering. Taking his stand just within the large, airy room he stood in grim silence with his arms folded across his massive chest, with his long shepherd's crook held in one brown, sinewy hand. Aaron stood by his side, also silent, but obviously uneasy.

In his eagerness to see Moses humiliated, as Jannes had assured him would be the case, Pharaoh wasted no time in taunting the man he hated, but curtly demanded of Moses to show some sign or wonder to prove the power of his God. Still without speaking, and with his large, dark eyes fixed upon the livid face of the man who had caused so much mis-

ery, Moses handed his crook to Aaron, who threw it upon the ground before Pharaoh.

Merneptah shrank back instinctively as in a flash it seemed to his staring eyes that the long crook was changed into the symbol of death, a snake coiled up ready to strike, with gleaming fangs erect and beady eyes turned malevolently upon the shrinking king.

Jannes broke the sudden tension with a cold, contemptuous laugh. Turning a stick into a snake was as standard a trick in Egypt as producing a rabbit from a hat with conjurers of modern times. If that was the limit of Moses's powers he had worried himself unnecessarily. At his command, all the Egyptian magicians threw down upon the ground the wands they carried, and instantly the place was alive with snakes slithering over each other, hissing their warning.

Jannes glanced in triumph at Merneptah, expecting to see swift relief take the place of obvious fright. Instead, he saw Merneptah lean forward with mouth agape, staring at the writhing mass of snakes as though unable to believe the testimony of his eyes. Jannes turned his wrinkled face to see the cause of that added fear . . . and his own toothless mouth dropped open in amazement. Moses's crook was seven feet long and thick as a big man's wrist, while the wands of the Egyptians were only slender reeds half the length. The floor had held one great snake and many small ones . . . and Jannes watched the great snake swiftly swallow one after the other of the priests' snakes until it remained alone. Then Aaron stooped and took the hissing symbol of death by the tail, and even as the priests looked to see it coil about

his arm and strike him dead, it turned again into a shepherd's crook, and Aaron handed it back to his brother.

Jannes had failed, and he knew it. This was an improvement upon the priests' performance, and something hitherto unknown in Egypt. But it did not convince the High Priest that the God of the Hebrews was greater than the gods of Egypt. Moses had been away from Egypt for many years, and possibly he had learned this, and other tricks, from the Chaldean magicians. Remembering their own practice of hypnotism, and that steady, unwinking look of Moses, Jannes was prepared to swear that this was the true explanation of the sign. Moses had compelled them all to believe that his crook had turned into a snake and swallowed the wands of the priests; that was all.

It was a terrific blow to the pride of Jannes, but his reaction to it led him to rise above his former fear of Moses. He lost sight of the slaves' leader in a professional rival, and so he whispered insistently to Pharaoh that he could, and would, do many more wonderful things than this.

Though badly shaken, Merneptah listened and believed because he wanted to believe. Now that the writhing horror was gone, it was easy to think that it had never been. But Moses remained . . . and at the sight of his impassive face, so utterly different from his own twitching, contorted visage, all his petty hate of the greater man swept up again within the heart of Merneptah. He was too shaken, however, to risk any further shocks, and so in a voice which he tried in vain to make normal he ordered Moses to leave.

Moses did so. He was not disappointed at the way things had turned out, for he had not expected more. He had spent

much time thinking over all he knew of Merneptah and had formed an accurate judgment of his character. He knew something of the stubbornness of weak men, that wounded pride and self-interest will often make a petty nature rush blindly on to certain disaster where a stronger man would win to safety by a change of policy. Because the mind of Moses was receptive to illumination from above; because he was wholly free from self-interest; he *knew* without bothering about whys and wherefores that one sign would not change Merneptah, and that it would need shock upon shock before he would let the slaves go free.

As he communed that night with his God, there came into his mind what he should do next to break down Pharaoh's stubborn will. It was the answer to his prayer for guidance, and he had no doubt that if he followed this inner leading and made his venture of faith, God would demonstrate His power over the world He had made.

Flowing through Tanis was a small tributary of the Nile, which lost itself in the salt-marshes a few miles nearer the sea. Merneptah, with that passion for personal cleanliness which was a feature of life in Egypt, had caused a big bathing-pool to be made in one of the banks of this stream, and first thing every morning he bathed within its cool waters.

Every one knew of his custom, and there were always crowds of people there to watch the king's arrival and departure, with his resplendent retinue. Among the crowd on the following morning were Moses and Aaron, waiting for Pharaoh.

Merneptah saw the towering form of Moses long before he reached the pool, and found himself inwardly quaking.

Looking furtively round him, he saw that the eyes of his followers were upon him, and read the wonder in their eyes as to what he would do. He thought they doubted him, and a burst of rage swept through him, taking the weakness from his slender body and enabling him to hold his head high again. So it was that he was able to meet Moses with much of his old insolent bearing, and only the covertly watching Jannes knew that it was the false courage of petty pride which supported him.

Standing directly between Pharaoh and the pool, Moses signed to his brother, and Aaron said:

"The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, hath sent me, saying, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Now by this sign shalt thou know that I am the Lord: I will smite with this rod the waters in the river and they shall be turned into blood, and the fish in the river shall die, and the Egyptians shall not be able to drink of its waters.' "

When Aaron had given the message, Moses handed to him the great crook, and leaning forward Aaron beat upon the limpid stream . . . and instantly its clear waters became blood-red.

"That is nothing, O Pharaoh; we can do likewise," said Jannes, his voice trembling with fury. At his swiftly spoken order men ran off to the Temple to fetch the priests, and with them many pots of water. Pharaoh waited impatiently. He was not terrified this time, for he had often seen the waters of the Nile turn red after reaching flood height. The priests had closely studied the phenomenon and had discovered that it was due to an immense number of tiny organisms filling the streams. Jannes knew that they had collected

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quantities of these microscopic creatures, to enable them to gain further credit and wealth by yet another illusion, and he was eager to demonstrate the new trick.

When the priests arrived, and the filled pots of water were placed before Pharaoh, they were as clear as the river had been so recently. But when the priests waved their wands over the pots and recited their mystic words the water turned red like that in the river.

It was enough for the man who wanted to believe in the power of his own priests, and with a contemptuous laugh upon his thin lips Pharaoh turned and walked back in silence to his palace.

But in the week which followed he knew again the meaning of uneasy fear. Men told him in trembling voices that the fish in the river were dying, and as their bodies floated to the surface and lay under the blazing sun they gave forth such a stench that no one dared drink of the river. In their need for water the people were digging shallow wells close to the river, but though they found water almost everywhere, it was the same red-tinted fluid against which their stomachs revolted.

For a week the crimson flood persisted, and then as suddenly ended, and Pharaoh and all the people of Tanis sighed with relief. Jannes saw how badly shaken Merneptah had been, and exerted all his cleverness to persuade him that there had been nothing supernatural in the incident. He produced many old men who swore solemnly that in the past they had known similar visitations. Jannes increased his hold over the king's wavering mind by pointing out that the priests had done something far more wonderful than Moses and Aaron.

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At their word the red flood had come up the river. So it always had. But by the magic of Egypt's priests it had not come borne upon the river, but stagnant water in clay vessels had been changed.

A month later Moses and Aaron appeared again at the palace, demanding audience, and Pharaoh's fears revived. He dared not deny their request, and this time he was told that if he still refused to let the slaves go free, Jehovah would send upon Egypt such swarms of frogs that they would cover the land and find their way into the palace and every house, hopping on to the beds and within the cooking ovens.

Though his face was ashen and his starting eyes betrayed his fear, Pharaoh stubbornly shook his head in refusal. Once again Moses handed his long crook to Aaron, and scarcely had his brother's hand taken hold of it than from outside the palace there came the deep "quark, quark" of frogs whose voices were out of all proportion to their size.

Pharaoh started to his feet, to look out from his window openings, but at a word from Jannes he sat down again. The High Priest had swiftly signed to three of his priests, who now stood before the trembling Merneptah. Apparently they were empty-handed, but as they made quick passes in the air, frogs dropped from their outstretched fingers and hopped about upon the floor of the council chamber, adding their discordant noise to the cacophony without. As it seemed that they could go on for ever producing the repulsive little creatures, Pharaoh cried to them to stop, and in a fury of weak rage shouted to Moses to leave him.

Then, shuddering with revulsion as he felt the cold touch of one of the frogs upon his bare skin, Merneptah shrilly

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commanded Jannes and the priests to charm the frogs away. But this was a task beyond the power of the clever jugglers. By dextrous palming they had been able to produce frogs from hidden pockets, but their magic stopped short at palming. The only way they could get rid of the pests was to stoop and pick them up one by one—and for every one they threw outside the window it seemed that a score hopped in.

Slaves and palace guards joined in the hopeless task, while from the rest of the palace shrill screams told that the women's quarters were similarly invaded. When night fell, chaos reigned. Frogs were everywhere, and their incessant croaking drove the distracted Merneptah almost insane. He neither knew nor cared what was happening elsewhere. All that concerned him was that the palace swarmed with clammy horrors. If he sat down to rest his aching limbs, they leaped upon his knees. When he fled to his bed-chamber, he found that the grim promise was only too true; they were there before him, and his bed was covered with a living counterpane the sight of which made him feel sick. In the end he was forced to climb upon a slender column and perch there in misery through the slow hours, watching his tormentors springing upwards in vain efforts to reach his refuge.

Jannes could do nothing with Merneptah that night. It was useless for him to try to convince Pharaoh that this again was nothing phenomenal, and that similar swarms of frogs had been known before, and always after the rivers had turned red. The priest was clever enough to guess that there was some connexion between the two events, but he did not know what it was. His guess was that the frogs had multi-

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plied so enormously because they had fed upon the unusual abundance of red parasites in the water. But he could not impart his thoughts to Merneptah, simply because his voice was drowned by the appalling quarking.

With the dawn Pharaoh screamed in his high-pitched voice for Moses to be sent to him, and a little later the stern-faced champion of an oppressed nation appeared before him. His elevated position made it easier for Merneptah to shout into the ear of his enemy, and he begged Moses to intercede for him with Jehovah, promising that if the frogs were removed he would let the people go and sacrifice.

Looking deep within the crafty, hate-filled eyes so close to his own, Moses doubted that pledge. Nor was he sure that Pharaoh really believed that the swarming frogs were a visitation from Jehovah. To convince the king that it was so, he asked him to state the time when the frogs should disappear, and Pharaoh said eagerly:

"By tomorrow."

"Be it according to thy word," replied Moses, "that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the Lord our God."

With that he left the palace, and with his passing there came an instant lessening of the dreadful din. As though smitten with a sudden pestilence, the frogs ceased their aimless leapings, to sit crouched up with swiftly pulsating bodies. A little later one after another collapsed and lay motionless in death.

Slaves swiftly gathered up those within the palace and removed them, and it was only then that Pharaoh learned the magnitude of the disaster. As the fierce sun made its slow passage across the sky, his nostrils were offended by a foul

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stench, and when he fiercely demanded the reason, he heard that the frogs had died in such vast numbers that the people could not destroy them, so that the land stank with the odours of decomposition.

Bathed and scented, clad in robes of finest linen which had escaped the polluting touch of the pests, Pharaoh sat and brooded over his humiliation. Moses had beaten him! That was the great, inescapable fact. In his helplessness he had turned to the man he hated so passionately. Now Moses would demand the fulfilment of the pledge and mock proud Pharaoh as he led the slaves way.

Merneptah writhed in torment as his overstimulated imagination pictured the look of triumph upon the face of his enemy, and the anger that is close to madness rioted through every straining artery. Raising his clenched fists, he swore by all the gods of Egypt that his enemy should not triumph over him and that the slaves should toil on in Goshen for ever.

The High Priest came to him while he was in this mood and strengthened him in it by his suggestions that Moses had done no more than take advantage of an unusually large swarm of frogs which had come from the marshes to the north. So, when Moses appeared the next day to receive Pharaoh's order to lead the slaves away, Merneptah savagely refused.

Again Moses handed his crook to Aaron, who stood with it outstretched, slowly revolving in a circle. No word was spoken this time, to tell the king what new calamity should come upon the land, and they left him wondering.

He had not to wait very long, and this time it was Jannes

who tasted the bitterness of defeat. His priests had been able by sleight of hand to reproduce in miniature both the crimsoning of the waters and the abundance of frogs, for they had their supplies of both pests in readiness for use when occasion needed an apparent miracle to impress the people. But there was one pest of which they had no supplies, and therefore which no conjurer could produce to order.

Personal cleanliness was one of the great virtues of all the Egyptians, but particularly so among the priests. It was more than an estimable social habit; it was part of their very religion. Since insect pests swarm in hot lands, it was a rigid rule among the priests to shave every particle of hair from their bodies, to bathe two or three times a day, and to wear none but the cleanest of linen robes. They knew that vermin breed in filth, and ancient Egypt's sanitary system was one of the world's wonders. Filth and the products of filth were held in passionate abhorrence.

Now to their dismay the land poisoned by the swarms of dead frogs seemed to erupt all the vermin they loathed beyond everything. No man could escape from the crawling horrors. Jannes, in a last vain attempt to poison the king's mind against Moses, ordered his cleverest conjurers to reproduce this wonder of sudden foulness in a clean country. They made their mystic passes and chanted long incantations, but nothing happened. They could not palm what they did not possess, through their religious abhorrence of things unclean, and in the end they had to confess defeat, crying:

"This is the finger of God!"

Again Pharaoh had to fight his battle between fear and

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jealous pride. Half crazy with the strain of the things he had endured, pride won the conflict yet once more, and, steeling his heart, he stubbornly refused to let the slaves go. Instead, he ordered his vast company of sanitary officers to set to work in cleaning the infected area. Since it was confined to Tanis and the near neighbourhood, the task was within their powers. As the days passed, the vermin were exterminated, and Pharaoh hugged himself with glee that he had not given way. If his priests were right, and it was indeed the finger of Jehovah which had brought the pest upon them, he had vindicated his boastful challenge to Him. Egypt's sanitary system had defeated the God of the slaves.

And even as he boasted thus to himself, the word of God came again to Moses, heavy with yet more trouble for Pharaoh. Accompanied by Aaron, Moses appeared again at the bathing-pool early in the morning, and once again demanded in the name of Jehovah that Pharaoh let the slaves go free, threatening him this time with a plague of flies which should make life miserable for every one in Egypt save the slaves in Goshen. Not Tanis alone this time, but all Egypt should learn that Jehovah "is the Lord in the midst of the earth," and controls its every happening.

Pharaoh brushed past him in silence, going on his stubborn way to tragedy. The flies came, great swarms of them flying from the marshes. Blood-hungry, they settled upon the bodies of the distracted people and bit them savagely. At home and also in the wide-open spaces of the desert or fertile areas it was the same thing. The winged pests followed the warm scent of human bodies and tormented them with stings which fevered the blood of the helpless victims.

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Pharaoh could no more escape them than the poorest Egyptian, and after a day of misery he sent for Moses and begged him to plead with Jehovah to remove the plague from the land. This Moses promised to do, after solemnly warning him not to act deceitfully again.

With the passing of the flies from the face of the land Pharaoh's evil genius came to strengthen him in his madness. For the first time in his long, misspent life Jannes had been publicly humiliated by Moses. In a fury of rage he had turned with renewed energy to his dark practices, spending the days and nights in efforts to commune with the spirits of the dead. Merneptah was obsessed by personal jealousy against Moses, but with the High Priest it had become more and more a conflict between the God of Moses and the gods he had served so long. Merneptah must not yield lest the God of the Hebrews should be acclaimed more powerful than the gods of Egypt. So now, when Pharaoh's stubborn pride was yielding before the succession of disasters, Jannes came to him and filled him with new terrors as he threatened what Egypt's gods would do in life and in death to one who yielded to their enemy. The threats of the priest succeeded in stiffening Pharaoh's waning courage, and again he broke his pledged word.

So far the troubles of that dreadful year had affected only the physical well-being of the Egyptians. They had endured discomfort, but they had not suffered financial loss. Pharaoh was holding on to the slaves because they meant free labour. Now he was to find it a costly thing to break his word. When next Moses came to him to repeat the demand for freedom, he warned the king that if he refused this time

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disease should break out among the cattle, horses, camels, and sheep.

The next morning the grim warning was fulfilled. In Pharaoh's palace his prized horses suddenly fell sick and died. The disease spread rapidly, affecting every four-footed thing alike, and they died in thousands. Moses had declared that the flocks and herds in Goshen, the cattle on which he depended for the flight, should be immune. With the cattle of the Egyptians dying all round him, Pharaoh sent messengers to the fertile Goshen valley, twenty miles to the south of Tanis, to report what was happening there. They returned with the story that Goshen was free of the disease, and not a single animal among the slaves had died from the pest.

The financial loss of the cattle disease was heavy, and Pharaoh's spies hinted at much grumbling among the Egyptians now that the long series of disasters was beginning to touch their pockets. But Pharaoh would not give way. Indeed, he felt that now he had additional reasons for holding on to the slaves. They were more needed than ever, for if he were to lose their free labour in addition to the cattle, it would take years for Egypt to recover from the double blow.

That the murrain on the cattle would have direct results upon the health of the people never entered the mind of Pharaoh or any one else. No one had seen any logical sequence of events in the catastrophes which had already taken place, any more than the modern world fifty years ago saw a connexion between the bite of a mosquito and malarial fever. Neither Moses nor Jannes, the two ablest

men of the period, guessed that the phenomenal swarm of micro-organisms in the branch of the Nile flowing past Tanis was the real cause of the series of tragedies. While they poisoned the river-fish, they also provided such an abundant food supply for the frogs in the marshes that the frogs increased to a correspondingly phenomenal extent, and the ibises and other water-fowl were unable to keep them down. With the passing of the red swarms the frogs needed other food supplies and so came from the marshes and invaded the drier area round and in Tanis. Only a few hours' existence away from the damp marshy ground, and of Egypt's torrid heat, was needed to cause the death of the plague of frogs, and their swift corruption infected the cattle as they were bitten by disease-bearing flies.

Moses appeared again to Pharaoh, at a time when Merneptah had called a great meeting of the priests of Egypt. Un-easy at the rumours of growing discontent among the Egyptians, he urged upon the priests the necessity for them to work such signs and wonders as would convince the people that they were more powerful magicians than Moses.

This time Moses resorted to one of those symbolic and intensely dramatic acts which never fail to impress primitive minds, for things seen make a deeper impression than words which are merely heard. Taking a handful of wood ashes from a dead fire, he cast them in the air, and a light breeze from the river carried the gossamer flakes so that they were scattered over the watchful priests.

They could perceive part of the meaning of the symbol. The dead ashes represented the dead cattle of Egypt; that was self-evident. But they could not read all the riddle, nor

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understand why Moses flung the ashes up into the air. But a little later they were conscious of painful swellings on their bodies, where the ashes had fallen . . . and once again they knew fear when Moses declared that a plague of boils should smite all Egypt.

By his action the Hebrew leader indicated that he at least perceived there was a connexion between the dead cattle and the boils which were to make life a misery for the Egyptians. They had tended the sick cattle, coming into hourly contact with fever germs with no knowledge of how to save themselves from infection, and so had contracted in a milder form the disease which had destroyed their cattle. But this they did not know, nor did Moses fully understand. He acted thus because of that inward compulsion which was driving him these days.

It has taken the world thousands of years, and much tragic experience, to discover this sequence of disease. But where the modern man speaks of microbes, the primitive man speaks of angry gods afflicting a people. To the child-races there are no "natural" causes of disease; it is always a supernatural act. So Moses and Merneptah alike attributed each single stage in the grim cycle of that disastrous year to Jehovah of the Hebrews. He was the particular angry God, proving Himself more powerful than the gods of Egypt.

Under normal circumstances with a primitive people, the confession that a particular disaster was due "to the finger of God" would have been followed by yielding to His demands. Pharaoh *ought* to have given way when his priests failed to produce vermin at his request, for their confession was the admission that Egypt's gods were beaten. His con-

tinued obstinacy—or, as it appeared to them, his continued challenge to Jehovah—was as baffling as the plagues themselves. Jannes, naturally a psychologist, like all fetish priests, had perceived Merneptah's hatred of Moses and played upon it, but not even Jannes knew enough of the human mind and heart to realize the lengths to which mad jealousy can drive a despot.

Moses himself was unaware of this personal element in the drama, but he also had to find an interpretation for Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to give way before the successive hammer-blows of adversity. To his deeply religious nature, and with his belief that Jehovah was all-powerful, there could only be one explanation. In order to show to Egypt His absolute might, Jehovah "hardened" the heart of Pharaoh. Neither to Moses, nor to the most religious minds for thousands of succeeding years, did that involve any moral problems. They were concerned only with the long and difficult task of making the world believe in the absolute supremacy of one God. The understanding of the character of that God was to be the concern of later ages.

The real miracle of this terrible year in which natural disasters assumed such colossal proportions was the perception by Moses of the coming of each successive stage, without understanding why they followed each other. The modern world reasons from long, close observation of facts. Moses did not, for he had neither the wide experience of pests nor the delicate apparatus of modern medical science. Yet he *knew* what was coming, and announced each disaster in the name of Jehovah. He knew, because he had come nearer to God in his soul than any man before him, or for

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long after. His mind was so responsive to God that things were revealed to him in the silent nights which no mere cleverness could reason out. He was kept in Midian until the slowly working, and even yet obscure, laws at work in God's world produced the pests which were to ravage the fair land of Egypt; years in which a weak, vicious king used his despotic powers to cause a nation's misery. Then, when the time had fully come, he was sent to announce the terrible things which were to come. Pride, greed, jealousy—all the weaknesses of a corrupt king—would make Pharaoh hold on to the slaves through many tragic months. But not even the most powerful of evil passions could endure for ever calamities so dire as to fill a primitive mind with the sense of God's overwhelming power.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SCOURGING OF EGYPT

She came with the dawn; a tall, lean woman wearing the drab clothing of a slave, but moving with the dignity of a queen. Though marred by the lines etched by many sorrows, her face still hinted at the beauty of former years. In those far-off days men, both among the captive Beni-Israel and the free-born Egyptians, had looked upon Miriam with desire.

Now, as she strode swiftly past the crowded huts in Goshen, the eyes of many men looked upon her again . . . and were swiftly averted. The great black eyes set deeply into that lined, impassive face seemed to burn and glow with hidden fires, filling those who watched her swift passage with a sense of tragedy to come. In that terrible year which had smitten Egypt with a succession of disasters the fertile valley of Goshen had escaped. To the easily roused superstitions of a credulous people it seemed that this stranger who ignored all greetings was the very angel of death, bringing Egypt's woes to lovely Goshen.

Now and again an older man looked after her, puzzled by a fleeting memory of something familiar about this stranger who went her way through the vast rabbit-warren of huts without hesitation. Those who stopped to stare after

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her gathered together into groups, debating volubly who she was.

They saw her stop at last before the hut shared by the families of Moses and Aaron, and enter it as one who had a perfect right. But none of them heard the amazed cry of Aaron as he leapt to his feet and ran to her:

"Miriam!"

Her burning eyes looked upon him for a moment, then roved among the shadows behind as she asked in a hard, level voice:

"Where is Moses?"

"He is upon the roof; wait here while I fetch him."

Even as he replied, Aaron hurried over to the ladder and began swiftly to climb. Rushing upon the flat roof he cried excitedly:

"Moses, Miriam has come at last!"

"Thanks be unto the God of Israel!" With the heart-felt cry of thanksgiving upon his lips, Moses made a swift descent and ran to greet the sister he had so longed to meet again. In the joy of reunion he would have taken her within his mighty arms, but she stepped back, checking him with an imperious gesture. Then for a long minute she stared steadily up into his face, the glowing eyes striving to read his very soul. His perfect features, and the exquisitely modelled head set upon a body more powerful than that of any man she had ever seen, made no impression upon her. The eyes are the tell-tales of the soul, and Miriam looked only into them. Then, as though convinced in spite of herself, she said in that level, emotionless voice:

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"Yes, I see you are Moses, the son of my mother and not of the Egyptian woman."

Her queer aloofness, the utter lack of any emotion, brought to Moses a feeling of profound dejection. He had sought her vainly in the days when he was a prince of Egypt, and it was largely because of her that he had yielded to the anger which in one moment lost him wealth and power and made of him a fugitive. All through the long years in Midian the thought of Miriam had been a sacred, treasured memory. Almost the first thing he had done on his return to Goshen had been to start inquiries for her, and even now many men were seeking her throughout Upper Egypt. Somehow he had known that she was alive somewhere, and that they would meet again . . . but he had never imagined a meeting like this. Though brother and sister, by her will she made their meeting that of strangers.

"Where have you been all these years?" demanded Aaron.

"The Egyptian woman," for so Miriam persisted in calling the Princess Merris, "had me taken to Upper Egypt. I escaped from there and fled to the border of Libya, and there I have lived in peace among those beyond the power of Egypt. Then came much talk of war, and Pharaoh's army came up against us, barring the road to Egypt. They have made peace, for a season, and now the road is open again, many have come with tales of strange things happening to Egypt through a Hebrew called Moses. From their talk I knew it must be the son of my mother, and remembering her words that our God would use you to deliver Israel, I came to find out if it was indeed true. But enough of me.

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Tell me; has God smitten these Egyptian dogs in His wrath? Does Pharaoh tremble at the name of Israel and Israel's God? Is the day of deliverance at hand? Shall we spoil the Egyptians, and avenge the wrongs of many years?"

There was no lack of emotion now, and in that moment Moses discovered his sister. Years of suffering and brooding hate had warped her very soul, burning up within her all kindly, gentle feelings. She was a woman living for one thing only, vengeance on her enemies. She had not come to seek a long-lost brother, but to meet the Scourge of Egypt. The years which had softened and mellowed Moses, years in which he had found his soul, had hardened her.

It was Aaron of the ready tongue who answered her eager questions. He told her of the series of disasters of the terrible year, and of the destruction of much of Egypt's wealth, and the sufferings of her people. Miriam's worn face lighted with terrible joy as she listened. For the first time she turned to Moses and spoke to him with warmth in her voice.

"Our mother was right: you are the chosen of the Lord, Moses. He will smite Egypt again, and yet again, until Pharaoh lets us go free."

Moses did not share the savage joy of Miriam. Though even more sure than she was that Israel would go free, he mourned the stubbornness of the despot which meant increased suffering to the people of Egypt.

"Aye, more sorrow comes to Egypt, and soon," he said heavily. "It is now many weeks since the cattle of Egypt died on every side, and boils broke out upon the bodies of those who tended them. I hear that they have all recovered from their sufferings, and that the priests have convinced Pharaoh

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that it was only a sickly year which made them suffer thus, not the God of Israel. Pharaoh is rejoicing, feasting his nobles in the palace, and assuring them that the troubles of Egypt are over at last and the sickness gone from the land. That is true . . . and yet I feel that something worse than sickness is coming to Egypt."

"What is it, Moses? Death for Pharaoh?" cried Miriam.

"Can you not feel something strange in the very air?" he answered. "I have been up all night upon the roof-top, listening to the lowing of the cattle. They are uneasy . . . and so am I. There is a strange heaviness in the air, and I cannot rest any more than the cattle in the fields. If this were Midian, and there were mountains round us instead of a plain, I should know that storm and tempest were gathering, for so I always felt in Midian when thunder was in the air."

In the excitement of meeting Miriam he had forgotten the feeling of foreboding which had oppressed him all through the night, but now it came sweeping back upon him. Though trained in all the wisdom of Egypt, Moses was none the less a man of his period. Generations of studious priests had studied the star-spangled skies of Egypt and become the pioneers of astronomy. Patience and profound application had opened the first few pages of the wonder-book of nature, and Moses knew their contents as well as any man living. But for him as well as others the rest of that book was closed. He knew nothing of the mightiest force in the universe, electricity. Thunder and lightning to him, as to every one else, were the terrifying evidences of divine anger.

That sun and moon and stars exerted a real influence over human life had become an accepted belief, but limited

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knowledge and superstition led almost inevitably to false ideas. Astrologers flourished in Egypt, reaping rich rewards for casting horoscopes for both rich and poor. The situation of the stars and planets at the moment of his birth was held to foretell a man's whole career.

Egypt knew that the heavens affected the earth, but had no means of knowing that it was by electrical disturbances which affected the atmosphere, and because of that influenced every growing thing. Those strange, unknown forces had already upset the balance of nature in that terrible year, causing such an increase in the micro-organisms in the river as to set up a sequence of disease and death. That had worked its course, and in the brief interlude of normal life Pharaoh and his priests rejoiced in the passing of a dreadful time. They did not guess that it was only an interlude: that what had come upon them was no more than the result of the first waves of the advancing electrical storm.

Nor did Moses. He, too, had interpreted the plagues of disease as evidences of the anger of Israel's God against those who had so evilly entreated the people of God. But Moses had knowledge hidden from Egypt's priests. It had come to him in the long years in Midian, where he lived in tune with God and nature. In his daily wanderings with the flocks of Jethro, watching them through endless hours of solitude, he had noticed with shrewd, observing eyes things which would not have impressed dwellers in the towns. Thunder and lightning had frequently come among the lofty mountains of Sinai, sometimes accompanied by torrential rains and terrific hailstorms. He had noted the uneasiness of his flocks before such disturbances, even when the sun blazed down

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from a clear sky. In time he had learned to associate those uneasy movements with the coming of thunder; and as the years went on, he himself experienced that sense of oppression and unrest, and knew with certainty what it portended.

But that was amid the wild mountain range of Sinai. He had never known it in the sandy wastes of Egypt or the fertile Goshen valley. Yet all through the day before the coming of Miriam he had felt it more powerfully than ever in Midian. It disturbed him so much that he could not lie down at night, but had spent the long hours alone on the flat rooftop staring steadily up into a cloudless, star-studded sky.

He had expected the dawn to reveal dark, copper-coloured clouds low down on the horizon, but the dawn had come with a clear sky . . . and Miriam. By her eager desire for the wrath of God to come upon Egypt she revived his forebodings, and with a hasty word to the others to follow him, Moses swiftly ascended again to the roof.

This time he saw what he had expected, but only because he looked for it. So low down that it looked no more than one of the frequent whirling dust-storms of the desert, he saw a finger of cloud where sky and earth seemed to meet. It was just such a cloud as had heralded the worst storms he had known, and that fact, coupled with the disturbance within his own body, was sufficient for this reader of the skies.

"Aye, God is going to smite Egypt again in His wrath," he said heavily. "Pharaoh will soon tremble with such fear as he has never known. Death comes riding on the skies, to take into his cold arms many in Egypt. Come, Aaron; let us go swiftly to Tanis to warn Pharaoh. Maybe he will heed

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us and let the people go, and then God will spare him."

This time Miriam went with them. In the heart of Moses there was only pity for the stubborn king and his people, and he desired to warn them so that their lives might be saved. But with Miriam it was otherwise. She strode by the side of Moses without apparent effort, unconscious of physical strain through the fierce emotions within her heart. She was going to look at last upon the enemy of Israel, and her supreme desire was to see Pharaoh struck dead upon his throne at the word of Moses.

Happy in his new-found sense of security, Merneptah gave them an immediate audience, looking up with arrogant disdain into the face of the man who had so sorely troubled him in the past. Moses wasted no time, for if his warning was to be of use, Pharaoh must act immediately. He had seen that finger of cloud rise steadily up into the sky as he hurried along the well-worn road to Tanis, and that storm and tempest was coming upon Egypt he knew with utter certainty. At his gesture to the chosen mouthpiece of God, Aaron spoke for him, as usual:

"Thus saith the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go that they may serve Me. I have smitten you with pestilence and still you exalt yourself against Me. Now you shall know that there is none like Me in all the earth! Behold, tomorrow at this hour I will smite the earth with such hail as Egypt has not known since it was founded. Now therefore send to your servants and bid them drive their cattle in from the fields and take shelter within their homes, for when the hail falls upon man or beast in the fields they shall die."

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With the warning delivered, Moses led the way out from the palace, ignoring the angry shouts of Pharaoh. Merneptah's pride again strengthened his weak will, and he cursed Moses by all the gods of Egypt. He sent no warning to the provinces, but the warning went in spite of him. Others within the palace had noted that what Moses declared would happen had always come to pass, and a very sincere fear of the God of the Hebrews had wakened in their hearts. Hailstorms were known among them, and dreaded for the damage they did to the growing crops. That dark, slowly mounting cloud on the horizon was visible confirmation of the warning. Moses had declared that it would be such a storm as Egypt had never known, bringing death to man and beast. That was enough for them, for they had cattle to lose. So, with the swift passing of the prophet of woe, they hurried to their fields to drive in their cattle, and as they went, they cried the alarm to others. It went from mouth to mouth, not only in Tanis but through the countryside.

Many of those who heard it, associated even upon the lips of flying rumour with the name of Moses, were filled with fear. They despised him as a leader of the slaves, and hated him as the cause of Egypt's troubles, but they believed him . . . and drove their cattle into shelter and hurriedly repaired roofs which had become leaky and unsafe. But others, sharing Pharaoh's disdain for the Hebrews, laughed as they listened. A hailstorm would do much damage to the crops, but who had ever heard of hail killing men or cattle?

As the hours of grace passed, the eyes of free-born Egyptians and captive Hebrews alike were turned towards the sky. Safely back in Goshen, Moses took his former stand

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upon the roof of Aaron's house and watched death come riding on the clouds. Slowly, yet with the inevitability of doom, the blue sky of Egypt was blotted out. As though pushed up from beneath by a mighty hand, great banks of cloud, looking almost solid, piled up higher and ever higher, their edges tinged with sulphurous yellow. Strange green and copper lights momentarily lightened the advancing black masses as vast sections of the cloud seemed to be shaken from within.

They came from Sinai, and moved up over the valley of Goshen. No man could say when dawn came upon that fateful day, for at the hour of dawn the sky over Goshen was as dark as at the midnight hour. It was a thing unknown to the oldest of the Beni-Israel, and fear ruled the hearts of the slaves even though they believed that storm was called up by the man they now hoped would be their Deliverer. Faith fought a losing battle with fear, and none among the Beni-Israel dared to creep outside his miserable hovel to stand beneath that canopy of death.

Added to the awful sight of the lowering sky was the utter stillness and silence. The world seemed to be dead. Not the faintest whisper of wind could be heard even among the reeds by the river-banks. The air felt almost solid, difficult to breathe. It was so heavy and stagnant that men stood with parted lips sucking it in noisily with labouring lungs, while sweat poured ceaselessly down their faces. In all that silent world the only sounds which disturbed the air were the whimpers of frightened children.

Then, when the hours of grace were almost ended, relief

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came to Goshen, and the Elders of the Beni-Israel began to sing the praises of Abraham's God. An edge of brilliant light far away on the deserts of Sinai revealed the limits of the storm-clouds, and they knew that it was passing over Goshen up to Tanis and the king who mocked at God. As the serried masses of cloud travelled along, blanketing the air and well-nigh suffocating all living things, the light increased, and with it came a perceptible easing of the stagnant air. Breathing became easier, and faith revived with the easing of the long tension.

But while Goshen rejoiced at the passing of the menace of death, Egypt in turn began to tremble. The advancing clouds seemed to be pressed down by immense weight, rolling slowly along less than a hundred yards above the earth. Then suddenly the black mass was split asunder as a jagged streak of violet light ran from top to bottom, and almost simultaneously came such a peal of thunder as made the very ground seem to rock.

It died away, and for a few minutes the deathly stillness came again while men held their breath, waiting for what might be. A second bolt of lightning ripped the clouds apart, and the thunder crashed and rolled and echoed among the billowing cloud-masses, to be succeeded again by that menacing stillness.

It was the hour foretold by Moses, and the centre of the storm was directly over Tanis. Now the pause was shorter, and not one but scores of vivid violet streaks of light flashed across the inky sky from end to end. Some of them ran parallel with the ground, but far more flamed directly from

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sky to earth. To the terrified people it seemed that these were the javelins of God, hurled in His wrath upon the king who had defied Him.

They were blinded by the brilliance of excessive light. Each incandescent streak of flame seared their eyeballs, so that they pressed their hands upon them instinctively to escape further hurt. But the pain of smarting eyes was a small thing. The crash and rumble of a thousand gigantic explosions in that supercharged air immediately above their heads deafened and bewildered them. The thunder was incessant. It was not one peal succeeding another, but one mingling with another, almost bursting their ears with the terrific uproar. The heavy air was bitter and reeked of sulphur, choking them and causing their labouring lungs to cough in retching spasms.

Dazed, stupefied, with that ceaseless series of aerial explosions, those within the shelter of the houses did not know that the hail had come. Thunder drowned the sounds of the impact of ice upon roofs. Only those who had laughed at the warning of Moses and dared to go about their ordinary work in the open spaces knew the ultimate terror of that dreadful storm. Great balls of ice, thick as a man's clenched fist, rained down upon them, tearing their flesh with jagged edges, breaking their arms, and crushing in their unprotected heads. As Moses had warned them, so it happened. Out in the fields, man and cattle were knocked down and hammered to death by that pitiless rain of ice.

Inside his great palace Pharaoh crouched in an inner room, his nerve broken, shivering incessantly and moaning for Moses to come and save him from the wrath of his God. Nor

was he alone in his abject terror. Jannes and Jambres, the two priests who had done more than all others to harden the heart of Merneptah against the Hebrews, were reduced to the same level. Lying prone upon the floor, they mumbled incoherent prayers to the gods of Egypt to protect them from the God of the slaves.

As the storm passed slowly to the north-west, the hail slackened and finally ceased, but even so, it was a long time before any dared venture into the open. When they did, they stood appalled at the sight of the damage which had been done. The vast fields of vegetables for which Egypt was famous looked as though great herds of buffaloes had run over them, trampling into the soil every tender plant. Branches had been torn from the trees and lay upon the ground, which was still covered with the gigantic hailstones. The flat roofs of many houses had given way beneath the pounding and accumulating weight. They looked upon such a scene of havoc and desolation as none had ever seen, and knew that this was the worst of all the troubles which had come upon them in that terrible year.

The storm had passed on, but it had not passed away. The great black cloud-masses filled the sky to the north-west, and though the sun shone out again upon smitten Tanis they could hear the distant rumbling of the thunder.

The storm had passed, but it might return. They knew enough to be aware of that. Pharaoh's shattered nerves led him to send for Moses, who, he felt, could save him from final catastrophe. Swift horses carried the message to Goshen, and Moses drove back to Tanis by chariot to meet the man who had now no disdain but only pitiful pleading.

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"I have sinned this time; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked," confessed Merneptah. "Entreat the Lord for me, Moses, for there hath been enough of these mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer."

Moses could not hide the contempt he felt for the vicious weakling who could not think straight nor speak truth. Merneptah's palsied hands and shaking voice revealed his terror, and Moses knew that it was fear, and only fear, which prompted that promise. When the clouds had rolled away and the menace was wholly lifted, Merneptah would swing over again from the extreme of terror to the other extreme of haughty pride. The damage done to the growing crops would need enormous labour to repair, and he did not believe Merneptah would set free the slaves whose labour would be needed more than ever. So he answered shortly:

"I will spread abroad my hands unto the Lord, and the thunderings shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know that the earth is the Lord's. But as for thee and thy servants . . . I know that ye will not yet fear the Lord."

And it was even so. The storm passed out of sight from Tanis, carrying its destruction elsewhere. Pharaoh went out to inspect the damage, and at the sight of so much loss he trampled upon his fears and resolved that Israel's slaves should repair the damage done by Israel's God.

Miriam alone rejoiced in the violence of the storm. From Aaron's roof-top she had watched the lightning play over distant Tanis, and listened to the constant rumbling of the thunder. It tuned with her own violent emotions, and she

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gloried in the thought that the enemies of her people were suffering. She was confident when Pharaoh's chariot came for her brother than Merneptah would let the people go, nor would she believe Moses when on his return to Goshen he told her of his doubts. But as the days passed, she found he was right. Instead of the order for release there came other commands for labour in the fields of Tanis, and she found that the storm which had smitten Tanis had only added to the sorrows of her people.

When this became apparent, she raged unreasonably against Moses, charging him with responsibility for this addition to Israel's woes. He bore with her patiently, urging her to wait and see what would happen next, his own faith in final deliverance unshaken. But as the weeks slipped by and life resumed its normal course, Miriam became ever more difficult to live with. She quarrelled constantly with Ziporah, Moses's wife, and to escape the bickering among the women Moses spent most of his time upon the roof, gazing long with brooding eyes towards Midian, where his happiest years had been spent.

It was because of this that he first became conscious of yet another trouble coming upon Egypt. A warm, dry wind from the east blew steadily across his roof, comforting in its coolness, but having its own message to the man who had so closely observed the forces of nature. In Midian he had known those steady winds, and remembered that they brought with them the dreaded locusts. Egypt knew the pest but rarely, for the locusts would not normally fly across the sandy wastes of Sinai. But if that wind continued without breaking—almost certainly if it increased in strength—it

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would blow them over the desert, for this was the season when the flying scourges of the East made their destructive flights.

The thought deepened to conviction, and once again Moses took Aaron with him to warn Pharaoh of coming disaster and make yet another plea to him to let the people go.

This time he found unexpected allies within Pharaoh's palace. Many of the Egyptians were now convinced that behind the long series of disasters was the God in whose name Moses delivered his warnings. Each visit of Moses had been followed by the fulfilment of his warning. How he knew what should be they could not tell, any more than they knew how the priests of Egypt performed their mysteries. They accepted the fact; the coming of Moses to Tanis was always followed by suffering and loss to them.

So now when he spoke of the coming of locusts, and they thought of the enormous damage wrought by the pests, they were made bold to speak against the despot whose stubborn will refused to face facts. Breaking through the habits of years, they cried desperately:

"How long shall this man be a snare to us, O Pharaoh? Let the men go, that they may serve their God. Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?"

Merneptah stared at them, his mind at first refusing to take in what he heard. The unbelievable had happened; the imperious will of a despot was challenged by his subjects. Perhaps his sheer inability to realize the enormity of the breach of age-old custom saved his throne for him, for the men were made desperate through past trouble and fears for the future,

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and a violent outbreak on his part might easily have caused a revolt.

By the time his slow-moving mind had grasped the new situation Merneptah had realized something of their mood, and that he must not force them too far. Jannes, his evil genius, saw the way out and whispered quickly to Merneptah what line he should take. Pharaoh nodded, and gave the word for Moses and Aaron to be brought again within the council chamber. His rebellious councillors had urged him to "let the *men* go to serve their God," and Jannes had seized upon their words. So, following the priest's suggestion, Merneptah declared that all the men of Israel might go and offer their sacrifice.

Moses demanded that the women and children should go also, taking the flocks with them. This Pharaoh refused, and even his councillors supported him. They would no longer support him in his refusal to permit the Hebrews' sacrificing to their God, and could see that leaving the women and children behind was a guarantee that the men would return. But if all the Beni-Israel left, taking with them the great herds of cattle which had been the wealth of the Beni-Israel in the days before their enslavement, but which they now tended for their oppressors, who had confiscated them, even the dullest-witted could see that it was unlikely they would voluntarily return to slavery. And they were no more ready than Pharaoh to lose their free labour and stolen herds of cattle.

Moses went from the palace knowing that the day of deliverance was still in the future, and that Egypt would learn her lesson only through bitter suffering. He noted as he

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walked along the Goshen road that the east wind was strengthening, and scarcely had he reached his home before the locusts appeared.

Borne upon the strong wind they passed over Goshen at a considerable height, filling the air with the rustling of countless wings, a noise so great that the wonder-stricken slaves had to shout to each other to be heard. Hour after hour the swarm continued, a mile in width, and so dense that during their passage they hid the sun from Goshen. But scarcely had the last stragglers passed over Goshen than the wind died away, and the swarm descended upon the fields round Tanis.

The young corn which had escaped the hailstorms suffered first, for the locusts fell upon it and in an incredibly short time consumed every blade. Passing on, they ate in minutes what thousands had toiled to grow to make up for the storm havoc. In one brief hour Tanis was surrounded by leafless trees and stripped fields, while the swarm passed on westwards to continue their destruction.

Fear came to Pharaoh at the first sight of the moving cloud above Goshen, and again he sent his chariot to bring Moses and Aaron back to intercede once more on his behalf. And again he made his easy, empty confession of sin, as insincere as himself. Moses, however, took him at his word and prayed earnestly that the plague of locusts might be taken from the land before all Egypt should be ruined.

The answer to his pleadings came with a sudden changing of the wind. It swung round to the westward, and every moment increased in strength, carrying with it myriads of grains of sand. The locusts could not face those flying parti-

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cles and took to the air again. Once off the ground they were borne upon the powerful air currents and carried over Goshen. The wind dropped at sundown, just as the swarm was nearing the Red Sea, and the weary locusts fell into the water in their millions.

News of the destruction of the swarm came quickly to Pharaoh, whose policy it was always to maintain close contact with every part of his empire. Now that he knew there was no further cause for fear, that no sudden turning of the wind could bring back the locusts, Merneptah felt that he could safely defy Moses. It seemed to him that he had reached the limit of trouble and nothing else could possibly happen. He was so sure of it that he countermanded even the permission for the men of Israel to go, and ordered instead that every one should hasten to plant new crops lest famine should follow.

In his folly he never stopped to think about that wind which blew so violently, first from the east, and then from the west. If he had, it must have seemed strange to him, for such winds were unknown in Egypt. Neither he nor any one else dreamed of the disturbances in the ether which were responsible, or that there was any connexion between the earlier terrifying electrical storm and these tremendous winds.

But there was, and before his orders to replant and irrigate the fields could be obeyed, the storm returned.

This time it brought with it no clouds, with thunders and lightnings. It was a disturbance of the upper atmosphere, too far off for human eyes to discern cloud formations. It appeared first as a blackness slowly spreading across the heav-

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ens, changing by subtle degrees the blue vault to inky blackness. It moved onwards until it came between sun and earth, and night came at high noon.

The creeping shadow spread until the whole of the sky disappeared, and men crept about in a darkness so intense that it seemed to be tangible. Nor could they tell when day passed into night, nor if the hour of dawn had come. Hour succeeded hour, and still that strange darkness endured, until hours seemed like days, and men despaired of ever seeing the sun again.

Fear of the dark is perhaps the oldest, deepest instinct within the human heart, and that endless night terrified the people of Egypt even more than crashing thunders or eye-searing lightnings. It seemed that the end of the world had surely come, for nothing could live for long in that dreadful darkness. Locusts might destroy a season's harvest, but given sun and moisture the fields would produce their golden stores again.

Given the sun! All Egypt loved the sun and worshipped the sun-god as giver of life. Now in their terror men cried to each other that the God of the Hebrews had pulled Horus from his throne in the sky—and they would die.

Pharaoh sent for Moses as soon as the darkness passed and the blessed sun shone again upon the land. He made yet another attempt to salve something from his wrecked plans, promising that the women and children might go with the men, but stipulating that the cattle should be left. In his heart he felt that, faced with the desert and without food, the Israelites would turn back again to Goshen and the cattle which had constituted their former wealth.

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Moses read his heart, and issued a final ultimatum. All the people and all the cattle should go! Pharaoh sat and looked at him for long minutes, saying never a word. His heart was seething with such a passion of anger against this man who had so often caused him to feel terror that he could not voice his thoughts. The figure of Moses became blurred and indistinct to him, seen through a red haze. There swept up within him yet again the craving to destroy this leader of the slaves.

Then suddenly something seemed to snap within his half-crazed mind. Hot rage was succeeded by a colder, more deadly fury, before which all fear of consequences to himself vanished. In a dead, flat voice he ordered Moses to leave him, saying:

"Get thee from me; take heed to thyself; see my face no more, for in the day thou seest my face thou shalt die!"

Looking down upon him from his great height, Moses saw the change, and knew that all the troubles of the terrible year had been only preliminaries to the great crisis which was soon to come. Pharaoh had decided to resist, and that decision was his last challenge to God. Moses had no doubt about the issue. The challenge would be taken up, and earth's most powerful king would find that he could not stand against God. So he answered briefly:

"Thou hast spoken well; I will see thy face no more."

With that he left the palace, and Pharaoh watched him go. Neither expected to see the other again, but the day was near at hand when mighty Pharaoh was to eat his bold words and, when sorrow had broken down his pride, send for the man thus summarily dismissed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DEATH RIDES THE SKY

The streets of Tanis were crowded with an excited mob making its slow way towards Pharaoh's palace. No one knew with certainty what was taking place within the council room where Pharaoh sat in state, but uneasy fears lurked in the hearts of high-born nobles and common peasants alike as they jostled together without thought of social distinctions. One name was on a thousand lips: Moses, the Hebrew leader, now the most feared man in Egypt.

Accompanied by his brother Aaron, he had gone into the palace an hour ago, demanding audience of Pharaoh . . . and a thousand free-born men asked with trembling lips what fresh calamity would follow his visit. Sorrow had pressed upon sorrow through that dreadful year, each scourge coming hard upon just such a visit as this. The leader of the slaves made a sudden appearance from Goshen, was closeted for a season with Pharaoh . . . and then came ruin to Egypt. Plague succeeded plague, until all Egypt now looked with fear-filled eyes into the gaunt faces of famine and disease.

The excited chattering died suddenly as a vast figure appeared upon the palace steps, and the guards hurriedly threw open the gates. There came a sound as of the rustling of wind among the tree-tops as the mob sighed its dread. No one cried the order, but a way was made for Moses as he strode

forward. One glimpse of his grim face turned the uneasy apprehensions into dread.

For Moses was in the grip of a white-hot rage. Only once before in his life had such a frenzy of fierce emotion possessed him. Then it was the sight of a brutal slave-driver using his strength to torture an old man, and in defending the slave he had struck a blow which snapped the slave-driver's neck like a rotten stick . . . and drove him into exile.

His wide-staring eyes now held the same fixed look, blazing with an inner fire. The thin, high-bridged nose was pinched and looked more than ever like an eagle's beak. The beautifully modelled lips had lost all their graceful curves, and were narrowed to a thin, straight slit. A knotted vein in the massive neck pulsed visibly. His powerful hands were clenching spasmodically as though lusting to crush the object of his wrath. It was no wonder that before that savage face, with its black beard thrust forward, men pressed back out of his path. They would as soon have disputed the right of way with an angry lion as get in the path of this giant who had the ear of a mightier God than any in Egypt's pantheon.

Even Aaron shared their fear of Moses. He had to run in order to keep up with his brother's long strides, but he dared not call on Moses to moderate his speed. He had seen that rage suddenly flare up in Moses as he turned to leave Pharaoh, and in that moment his brother became a stranger. The patient, forbearing advocate of a nation's wrongs, obviously grieving even when he had to speak the word of judgment, had given place to an implacable avenger.

No word was spoken by any one as the two passed through the frightened crowd and disappeared beyond the

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town along the Goshen road. Then a babble of talk broke out, and vast numbers of terrified men ran off to offer many sacrifices to their gods in a frenzied attempt to avert the doom they had read upon the face of Moses. Nor did Aaron of the ready tongue venture to break in upon the silence of his brother. Gasping with the strain, he toiled along some distance behind with sweat streaming down his face.

He had heard Pharaoh's savagely voiced command that Moses should not look upon his face again, with the threat that if he did so he would die, but he could not understand why it should have roused his brother to fury. Merneptah had blustered many times before, and Moses had never given way to such violent emotion.

It was a whole hour before Moses realized that he was striding on alone, and looked round to see where Aaron could be. He saw him at last, a tiny, labouring figure in the far distance, and stood still while Aaron overtook him, to fall panting by the wayside. Moses sat beside him while Aaron slowly recovered his breath, and then the big man broke into fluent, unaccustomed speech.

"Pharaoh's cup is full to overflowing. A slinking, greedy jackal sits upon the throne of mighty Egypt these days! He has ground the faces of the Beni-Israel into the dust, caring nothing for the sufferings of men or women or little children. Nor does he care for the lives of his own people. The Lord Jehovah has warned him again and again to let the Beni-Israel go free, and the hand of our God has been shown in the sufferings of Egypt. But Pharaoh's greed is stronger than Pharaoh's fears. To possess a million slaves and the cattle which are theirs he is ready to defy Jehovah . . . and bring

death upon Egypt. Because a king sins his people must suffer—a weakling I could break with these hands of mine.”

“Why didn’t you?” cried Aaron involuntarily.

“Because Israel would have paid the penalty for such madness,” replied Moses curtly. “If I had slain Pharaoh, the palace guards would have slain us, and all that would have followed would have been that a new Pharaoh would sit upon the throne, and the slave-drivers’ whips be worn out in Goshen.”

“Then what is to be done?” asked Aaron sadly. “Pharaoh has driven us forth, and we must not look upon his face again. It seems that the day of deliverance is further off than ever.”

“The day is at hand,” declared Moses. “Pharaoh has defied Jehovah too often. Coming from Tanis the Lord has spoken to my spirit, and I have seen visions of terrible things which now shall come upon Pharaoh and all Egypt.”

“What things?” whispered Aaron, his face paling as he noted the implacable look upon his brother’s set face.

“Death for many in Egypt, and trial of the Beni-Israel,” answered Moses. “In the dark hour of midnight the angel of death will go through the land of Egypt, smiting as he passes the first-born of man and beast, from Pharaoh down to the maidservant that is behind the mill. There shall be such a great cry throughout Egypt as has never been!”

“But what of Israel?” said Aaron, with eyes widening as he visualized that terror by night.

“All Israel that is true to Jehovah shall be safe,” replied Moses. “Not even a dog will wag its tongue against one of the Beni-Israel. Not only shall our people be safe from the Terror, but Egypt shall pay in part that which Egypt has

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kept back by fraud and violence. When we return to Goshen, see to it, Aaron, that every man and woman of the Beni-Israel asks of the Egyptians who have ruled over us in Goshen jewels of gold and silver. These shall be part of the wages of our slavery."

"They will never give them," protested Aaron.

"They will not dare to refuse," said Moses. "The fear of Jehovah is in the hearts of the Egyptians now that they have seen something of His power. Let the people demand in the name of Jehovah, and they shall spoil the Egyptians."

"Why did you say all Israel which is true to Jehovah shall be safe?" asked Aaron. "Surely all Israel is true to Him."

"Have you not heard the murmuring of the people?" said Moses sternly. "Pharaoh has made them toil upon the land round Tanis to repair the havoc of storm and locusts, and many in Israel have spoken with bitterness against me, saying that since I came to speak for them to Pharaoh, I have added to their sorrows, and they wished that I had stayed in Midian. Have you not heard their words, Aaron? Were your ears stopped when Miriam reproached me in your own house?"

"They spoke without thinking," urged Aaron.

"Not so, but because of the evil in their hearts," said Moses. "During these months while Jehovah has made bare His arm in defence of Israel I have moved among our people, watching and listening, and there have been times when I have feared Israel even more than Egypt. Many of them are now slaves in their spirits and have turned aside to the false gods of Egypt. They love the leeks and cucumbers of Egypt. When their stomachs are full, they can sing even though they are slaves. Their bondage galls only when their bodies

grow lean with hunger. How can such a people ever become a mighty nation, or live secure in their own land? There are many of the Beni-Israel, Aaron, a host like the sands of the sea for number, even as Jehovah promised our father Abraham; but the Beni-Israel are not yet a nation. They have lived too long under the spell of the slave-drivers' whips. What will happen when they are set free? They have not yet learned to do right because it is right; nor to hate wrong just because it is wrong. I have seen how they betray each other to the taskmasters, to escape a flogging or to curry favour with the Egyptians. They have not yet learned to stand together as one. How can such a people endure the test of freedom when it comes?"

Aaron looked at him aghast. Such pitiless criticism of his people seemed to the easy-going Aaron to be bordering on blasphemy. A man of strong emotions, he spoke or acted as the impulse moved him and had never trained himself to think deeply. Not for the first time, he found himself baffled by his silent, intense brother, whose keen intellect had been trained to ponder over every fact that shrewd eyes observed.

He noticed, with relief, that the look of furious anger had passed from his brother's face, though its expression was sterner than Aaron had ever seen it. For the first time Aaron was sharing that fear of Moses which all others felt. Moses seemed to be a man apart, neither wholly a Hebrew nor an Egyptian. So, in honest bewilderment, he asked:

"Have you forsaken Israel, Moses, that you speak such words?"

Moses shook his head impatiently as he replied:

"I am the chosen of the Lord, and through me He will

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deliver Israel from Egypt. Pharaoh has rejected his last chance of escaping doom, and for that mean jackal on the throne I feel such bitter anger as I have never felt for any man. A king should be the father of his people, using his power to save them from harm. Pharaoh's greed will bring death upon multitudes of his people, and for that I could wish him dead."

Aaron nodded in fullest agreement, for such sentiments appealed to him as loyal to Israel. Like many men, he found it easy to condemn another nation, but could not endure even a slight upon his own race.

"Then why did you speak evil of Israel?" he demanded.

"Because I see that there is something which must be done which is far more difficult than to deliver them from Egypt," replied Moses sternly. "If Israel is ever truly to be free, Israel must learn the meaning of loyalty, discipline, obedience. These are things which cannot be learned in a day, nor in a year. Egypt has done more than make Israel toil for nothing. Egypt has spoiled the soul of the Beni-Israel. I have seen with shame and sorrow how many of our people even in their poverty have made many sacrifices to cows and cats and all the other abominations of Egypt. These things I have seen, and for one idol-worshipper among the Beni-Israel I know there must be a score I do not know. Israel has sinned against Jehovah, Aaron! It is only by the mercy of Jehovah that Israel will not share in the doom which is to come upon Egypt. It was for that reason I said that God will make trial of Israel in the hour when He smites Egypt."

Aaron could not deny the truth of what Moses said, for he knew even better than his brother how deep was the cor-

ruption of the slaves of Goshen. For many years there had been no one to speak in the name of God, and even the memory of the founders of the Beni-Israel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had become dim. Yet, because they were essentially a religious people, they had felt the need to worship, and vast numbers of the slaves had turned to Egypt's many gods. If Jehovah was going to visit in wrath all who had forsaken Him, then it seemed to Aaron that Israel would suffer as sorely as Egypt. The prospect appalled him, and he could find no words to say.

"In this hour while my spirit has been hot within me God has revealed many things to me," said Moses after a long silence. "There is much that we have to do, and quickly, Aaron. If the angel of death is to pass over the sinners in Israel, they must first forsake the gods of Egypt . . . and prove their faith in Jehovah. They have sacrificed to idols: now they must offer a sacrifice which shall be both a confession of their sin and of faith in Jehovah."

"What can they offer which shall turn aside the wrath of Jehovah?" asked Aaron, his fear revealed in his shaking voice.

"This is what Jehovah has shown me," said Moses. "Since there are those in every family who have fallen into idolatry, the sacrifices shall be offered by families. The head of each household shall take a lamb from his flock, one that is without blemish. It is the best, and only the best, that men shall dare to offer to Jehovah. The lamb shall be slain, and as the blood is the life-stream itself, they shall take it and sprinkle it upon the side-posts and the lintels of the doors of their houses. By the shedding of blood they shall acknowledge

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their sin. By putting it upon the door-posts they shall confess their faith that Jehovah will surely visit Egypt's sins upon her. When the angel of death sees the blood upon the door-posts, he will know that within the house is a family of the true Beni-Israel, a family which has returned to Jehovah."

"No man will dare to refuse," said Aaron. "A lamb is a small thing to give in exchange for life."

"Did I not say that this would be a testing of Israel?" said Moses. "Those whose hearts have turned away from God will not believe the word spoken. But there is more. Israel will go forth in haste from Egypt. I have told the people many times that deliverance comes, but because the day has tarried many no longer believe. This shall be their test, for it is the will of Jehovah. For seven days they shall eat the bread of those who travel swiftly. For seven days they shall not mix leaven with their bread. The unleavened bread shall be a sign that they go upon a journey . . . and only those who believe in the promise of Jehovah, that He will deliver them, will obey His word. Thus by blood and by bread Israel shall prove her faith in the power of God to save them from death and deliver them from bondage."

"It is good," nodded Aaron, greatly relieved. "Our people will understand such signs, and I think they will all obey."

With that, both men arose and hurried over the last stage of the journey back to Goshen. Messengers were then sent to summon the Elders of Israel, and Moses explained to them with careful detail how Israel might escape the coming disaster. If any of them had begun to cherish doubts about Moses's being indeed the Deliverer of Israel, those doubts were swept away as they saw his face and heard the note of authority in his voice. With the fear of death in their hearts

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they gathered together the sections of Israel of which they were the acknowledged leaders, and repeated the commands of Moses.

And now the real authority of Moses was made manifest. Egypt had learned to fear him above all men. The slaves of Goshen shared that fear and made haste to obey his word, their accusing consciences urging them insistently. So for a week all Israel ate only unleavened bread, and on the appointed day gathered themselves together in families. They came in from the fields of Goshen, leaving the cattle untended. Men whose labours took them far up the Nile came hurrying back to Goshen, heedless of threats and blows from infuriated taskmasters. Even Pharaoh in his great palace in Tanis was made to feel something of what was happening in Goshen. Thousands of slaves employed about the palace and in the town suddenly disappeared, flocking back to join in the great symbolic act of faith which should save them from death.

Moses had seen the open idolatry of many in Israel and believed that thousands of the men would disregard his warning and therefore perish. The thought had been anguish and was the principal cause of that hour of bitter anger against Pharaoh. Since all Egypt was behind him in oppressing the slaves and supported him in the refusal to let Israel go, Moses's keen sense of justice was not outraged at the thought that all Egypt should suffer with Pharaoh.

With Israel it was very different. The slaves had known such terrible suffering and had had so few joys in life that he longed to see every one of them escape to a new country of their own. It was a passion of pity which inspired him to dream of leading the biggest mass-movement in history and

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nerved him to defy a despot. But pity for a nation of slaves was subordinate to his loyalty to Jehovah. He was a man of God first; a leader of the slaves second. Hence, when there came a conflict of loyalties, he took the side of God against the very people he pitied so profoundly. If they turned aside from God they must perish! That was his simple creed, from which he never swerved, though at times its enforcement was to cause him agony.

He had overlooked the fact that he was really a stranger in Israel. Except for a few short months all his life had been spent either among the Egyptians or in the quiet mountains of Midian. Inevitably he judged his people by himself. As he was wholly loyal to Jehovah and would not swerve to the right hand or the left in following Him, so he believed that the idolaters among Israel would as loyally serve the gods of Egypt . . . and perish through their folly.

The one thing he had not counted upon was that which actually happened. A great wave of religious fervour swept through Israel. A strongly emotional people, they could easily respond to an appeal to their emotions. Fear now had them in its mighty grip, and the idolaters were among the first to seek their households, to participate in the family sacrifice.

But when the lambs were duly sacrificed and the blood symbols sprinkled upon the door-posts, their fear did not subside. It deepened into that soul-shaking dread which wholly unnerves. Throughout the whole of Goshen, in every one of the vast rabbit-warren of huts, men and women cowered behind closed doors suffering torments as the minutes dragged slowly on.

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Moses had declared that the angel of death would come at midnight . . . and none dared pass through the blood-sprinkled doors to gaze at the stars to see if the hour had come. With no light save a guttering wick floating on oil to illuminate an almost tangible darkness, they waited with straining ears to hear the rustling of the wings of death. At the first approach of night, when the sacrifices were made, a million voices rose in prayer to a neglected, or forsaken, God to have mercy upon a sinful people. With the passing hours the trembling voices stammered away into silence. Parched lips and stiffened tongues could not even pray.

In that night of terror many, tortured by memories of hours spent in heathen temples, felt the sentence of death upon them. They grovelled upon the floors of their huts, shaking in every limb and drenched with the cold sweat of fear.

For the first time Israel began to understand something of the cost of redemption from evil. Hitherto throughout that dreadful year it had been Egypt which suffered while Goshen went free. With the bitter heritage of years of wrong they had rejoiced over the stricken fields of Egypt and laughed at the physical suffering of the oppressors. That Jehovah was angry with Egypt was a comforting thought. It had never dawned upon them that judgment would begin with the house of God; that if they were to be led by God, then they must be the people of God in fact as well as name. They had regarded the afflictions of Egypt as compensation for their own sufferings and never looked within to see if they too merited punishment for wrong-doing.

By the symbol of innocent blood shed as an offering for

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sin their eyes were being opened at last. It was a symbol which touched their imaginations. It made them realize that their safety did not rest upon themselves, because they were born among the Beni-Israel. Nor because they had endured so much wrong at the hands of Egypt. Their safety, their very lives, depended upon an act of faith. In obedience to Jehovah's command they had sprinkled the symbol of life upon their doors to keep death from entering. Now, through hours of agonized dread, they had to wait to see if death would pass over those who obeyed.

At last there came the sound for which a million people waited. From the house of an Egyptian slave-driver, set among the huts of his victims, there came a sudden scream of agony, and the shrill wails of women. It was followed a second later by similar cries from the house of another Egyptian . . . and another. The silence of that long, terrible night was torn asunder. Many thousands of Egyptians dwelt in Goshen, and from every one of their houses came the tragic sounds of grief.

Death had smitten their first-born! Son or daughter, as they lay in peaceful sleep there came a sudden seizure, a swift convulsion, a gasping cry or high-pitched scream . . . and silence. Startled from their deep sleep by those sounds of mortal anguish, the bereaved parents watched with horrified eyes the final death-tremors, unable to realize what was taking place. But when understanding came, as those still forms made no response to voice or touch, then from the houses of the Egyptians came a great cry. The God of the Hebrews had struck once again. This time it was not death to the cattle in their fields, but death within their homes.

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Driven by panic, they rushed forth from the chambers of death and in the streets abandoned themselves to mingled grief and fear with Oriental completeness. Men, women, and children, they screamed and wailed and shrieked, smiting their breasts one moment, and the next waving their clenched fists at the closed huts of the Hebrews and yelling maledictions upon them. Those whose fear of the death which flitted through the darkness exceeded their love for stricken children cried hoarsely to their gods to save them from the power of the God of the slaves, or begged for mercy from the God they had so long derided and whose people they had enslaved.

The sudden outbreak of noisy grief and frenzied fear brought no peace to Israel. Now that they knew that at last the angel of death rode along the sky, those blood-sprinkled doors seemed a pitifully inadequate barrier. While men forced their dry mouths to croak out prayers to Jehovah to remember Abraham and have mercy on his children, women clutched their children to their shivering breasts in a blind hope that love could safeguard its objects.

While the dawn yet tarried, there came the noise of horses driven furiously from the direction of Tanis. Heedless of who might be trampled upon by those flying hooves, a racing-chariot tore along the wide road which led through the centre of the slaves' quarters. The driver, a powerful Nubian from Upper Egypt, pulled up his sweating team near Aaron's house and shouted excitedly for Moses. When the Hebrew leader came out he cried:

"Up into the chariot, quick! Pharaoh sends for you and Aaron."

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The Nubian made no attempt at conversation. Leaning forward, he kept his long whip cracking ceaselessly about the heads of his four magnificent horses, so maddening them with its stinging lash that they raced as never before. Moses and Aaron clung to the heaving, bouncing chariot, too jolted by the springless vehicle to exchange a word.

It was still dark when they reached Tanis, but before they entered the town they knew that the angel of death had passed that way. The hoarse roar of thousands of voices sounded above the pounding of the flying hooves, telling of yet another frenzied mob keening its dead.

It needed all the Nubian giant's strength to pull the horses to a standstill before the palace gates, where Moses and Aaron dismounted. The mob, which had scattered before the flying chariot, gathered around the gates again with its passing. Somehow they knew that Moses had returned, to speak with the king who had warned him never again to seek his presence. And now the hoarse, inarticulate roar of the crowd subtly changed. Howls and shrieks began to merge into words. Even as Moses passed through the wide portals of the palace the words rang out harshly, menacingly:

"Let the Hebrews go, or we be all dead men!"

Pharaoh heard it, as he sat by the side of his dead son. Despot as he was, he knew that he dared withstand the demand of Moses no longer, for now his own people had turned against him. But he had no thought of further resistance. For the time being even his stubborn will and passionate pride were crushed. All the love of which his weak, selfish nature was capable had been centred in his son . . . and now he

was dead Pharaoh did not care much what might happen.

Lifting his haggard face as Moses and Aaron entered, he said dully:

"Get you forth from among my people, both you and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone . . . and bless me."

The capitulation was complete. Merneptah conceded everything Moses had demanded, eating all his proud defiance. Moses heard him in silence, but his keen eyes looked into the haggard face before him as Pharaoh whispered his plea for a blessing. The generous heart of the Hebrew leader would have found it easy to respond to that appeal from a broken enemy. But Moses had long since learned to control his emotions and to make his head rule over his heart. So now he looked into the face of one who had so often acted treacherously, probing him to the depths of his mean soul . . . and knew that the plea was only prompted by fear. Pharaoh had yielded under the last of the long series of shocks, but his vicious nature was unchanged. There would be another revulsion of feeling, and then Pharaoh would listen again to the vengeful priest Jannes and strive to unsay his spoken word.

There was therefore need for haste, for Moses had no illusions about the colossal task of evacuating so large a number of people, most of whom were unaccustomed to travelling. He therefore demanded that another chariot should be provided, and in this he and Aaron returned to the Land of Goshen.

The sun was well up as they drove along the familiar

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streets, which had a queer sense of unreality. Little groups of slaves were to be seen everywhere, talking to each other in tones unusually soft. Their faces showed clearly the strain of that terrible night and were heavy with apprehension. Death had passed over them once; would the next night find them also wailing for their dead? There were other groups, men and women of Egypt who for so many years had walked arrogantly through Goshen. These spoke but seldom, standing in a sombre silence, staring with eyes of hate at the slaves. Moses cried aloud that Pharaoh had ordered the Beni-Israel to leave Goshen. There was a brief period of stupefied silence, for hope so often deferred had grown very sick. Then, as the true significance of that order broke into their minds, the Beni-Israel went into transports of joy. The older men and women, whose bodies were bent with toil and scarred by whip-lashes, lifted their faces to the blue sky above and with streaming eyes poured out their broken thanks to the God of Abraham. Younger folk leaped and danced, seeking through physical effort relief for their over-charged emotions.

Freedom at last! Mothers looked through tear-blinded eyes at their little ones, glorying in the thought that they would never know the awful degradation of slavery. Men who had been torn from their wives and forced to work in Tanis or in the towns along the Nile looked with shining eyes into the faces they loved, whispering that now there would be no more partings. The Beni-Israel were *free*, and soon would be in their own land where none should dare to make them afraid!

In their wild excitement no one heeded, or even heard, the command of Moses that they should gather their possessions

and begin the march. They did not realize the need for haste, and would have spent the long day in excited talk and impromptu dancing. Moses therefore sought out the Elders one by one, and warned them that many times before Pharaoh had promised and then taken back his words and that it might be so again.

At the mere suggestion of yet another frustration of hope the Elders ceased their thanksgivings and ran among the people crying their fears. For a long while they could make but little impression, but eventually their fears sobered the excited crowds. Then the Egyptians unexpectedly came to the help of Moses. There was not a house belonging to them in which there was not one dead . . . and they feared the coming of another night with the slaves still in Goshen. So, with eyes full of hate and hearts full of fear, they urged the slaves to begin their march from Goshen.

Only then did Moses understand why he had been led to make the unleavened bread one of the symbols of faith. So vast a host needed enormous food supplies, and to carry sufficient bread would have been impossible with no time for organizing. But as it was, every household had its stock of unleavened bread all ready, sufficient for their immediate needs, and had become used both to its making and to its consumption.

While thousands of the younger men ran off to the fields to bring in the great herds of cattle, Moses repeated his order that the people should demand of the Egyptians ornaments of gold and silver in partial payment for the years of unpaid labour. Snarling their hate, yet too terrified to resist, the Egyptians gave them the trinkets bought with a nation's life-blood, and not until the word was brought to him that

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the last Egyptian had been spoiled of his ill-gotten treasure did Moses give the word for the great trek to begin.

With his great form leading the way, the slaves began the march through Goshen, leaving for ever the squalid huts in which they had so long wept in misery. They sang as they marched; extemporized hymns of thanksgiving to the God of Abraham, and praises of Moses their Deliverer. The accompaniment to their happy songs was the incessant lowing of thousands of cattle, whose slow-moving feet stirred up so great a cloud of dust that through it the sun shone redly.

So they marched on through the brief hours of the afternoon, with their backs towards Egypt and their faces towards an unknown land. Joy was singing its song within their hearts, joy which found some outlet in their hymns of praise. God had delivered them, and never again would they be in bondage to any man!

Only one man marched with uneasiness in his mind, an uneasiness which caused him to look back to the north-west again and again. Moses knew Pharaoh . . . and Israel. He could not believe that Pharaoh would make no effort to regain the vast multitude of slaves when his temporary fear had subsided, and so as he led the way to Sinai, he had an eye for the dust-clouds which should tell of chariots driving furiously. And he knew the Beni-Israel. They were a mob, not an army. What would happen if and when the hosts of Pharaoh came upon them?

But not even Moses guessed what should be the final act in the great drama, and how in their hour of desperate need the Beni-Israel should be delivered yet once more by the God who ever defends the weak and the oppressed.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE GREAT DELIVERANCE

Merneptah, Pharaoh of Egypt, stood at one of the big windows of his palace in Tanis looking moodily across the sunlit courtyard. The embalmers were taking away the body of his eldest son Seti to prepare it for burial. The clanging of the great gates behind them echoed in his ears and seemed to emphasize his loss.

A slow rage against its author began to mount within him. Moses had humiliated him again and again. Merneptah writhed inwardly as he thought of the manner in which the Hebrew leader always dominated him. He had refused even to speak directly to one whom all Egypt regarded as a god, employing his brother Aaron as his mouthpiece. It was an insult to his majesty which Merneptah raged against, yet somehow endured, when the big, serene leader of the slaves stood before him. Now Moses had more than humiliated him: he had struck at his heart through the death of Seti.

Panic-stricken and distraught in the presence of death, he had given way and permitted the slaves to go free. Now that his panic had gone and grief was yielding to rage, he wished he could unsay his words, as he had so often before.

The sight of the palace guards springing forward to open the gates interrupted his bitter thoughts. Looking to see who dared to intrude upon his mourning, he started slightly as

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he saw the tall, thin form of the High Priest Jannes. The old man came through the gates with long, purposeful strides, holding himself unusually erect. Merneptah noticed that over the white linen robe draped from the lean shoulders Jannes wore the skin of a leopard, and understood its significance. Jannes had been offering sacrifices to one of Egypt's gods, and that he had come direct to the palace from his worship could mean only one thing. The gods had spoken to him, and their word concerned the king!

Merneptah's heart missed a beat as fear gripped him again. Belief in the reality and power of those gods was no mere lightly held opinion with him; it was part of his very nature. Jannes always made him feel uneasy, and often afraid, for Merneptah had seen him perform such wonders as no other priest could emulate. It was only during this last terrible year that he had lost some of his fear of the masterful priest. Moses had eclipsed him, and Merneptah had seen terror in the face of Jannes when the great storm swept over Tanis. Since that day the old man seemed to have shrivelled up, and he walked with a pronounced stoop. During the more recent clashes with Moses the priest had remained silent and let Merneptah shout and bluster.

Now it was evident that something had happened to Jannes. He looked ten years younger. The lean shoulders no longer drooped, and as he entered the great council chamber Merneptah could see the dark eyes burning with their old fire.

"The gods are angry, Pharaoh," he cried, his voice sharp and incisive as a whip-lash. "Why have you let the Hebrews go?"

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"What else could I do? Our own people rose against me. You saw them thronging the streets, shouting that I should release them or we should all die. As it is, the God of the Hebrews has slain our sons."

"Not the God of the Hebrews but the gods of Egypt," interrupted Jannes menacingly.

"Our own gods have destroyed us!" gasped Merneptah. "But surely that is madness, Jannes. They should fight for us, not against us. It is the Hebrew God who has worked this evil."

"The Hebrew God could have no power over Egypt if our gods fought for us," retorted Jannes. "They have seen that you, and all our people, have feared this new God; that you let a slave defy you in your council. They have held their hands, watching to see how far you would go. Thoth has entered this in his book against you, O Pharaoh: that you set at liberty those whom the gods gave to Egypt to make us great."

Merneptah staggered to a couch and collapsed, his shaking limbs unable to bear his weight. His weak, effeminate face had suddenly become haggard, and his eyes were big with horror. All his life he had believed that after death his soul would have to stand at the bar of Osiris, when Thoth would read from his sacred tablets the record of his life. By incessant careful attention to the ritual worship he had thought himself secure. Now it seemed that the flaming hell of Egyptian belief was yawning before him.

It was not so much the words of denunciation as the whole attitude of Jannes which terrified him. The priest had spent many hours in his secret room, using all the mysteries of the

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priests to enter into communion with the spirits of the dead. Now he was not merely arrogant. He was so absolutely sure of himself that he seemed to radiate an authority that was supernatural.

"What can I do?" moaned Merneptah.

"Have you no chariots?" demanded Jannes. "Go after the Hebrews and bring them back; then maybe the gods will wipe off from their tablets this sin against them."

"But what of my people? They, too, fear the Hebrew God, and they will kill me if further trouble comes upon them."

"It seems that the people have more wisdom than Pharaoh, who should be to them as a father," sneered Jannes. "As I came through the streets, they were saying everywhere, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' While Pharaoh has sat still in his palace, trembling like a woman at the thought of the man who has humbled him, the people have seen the ruin which has come upon Egypt through your folly. Look out of the window upon the fields. Can you see a single man tilling the soil? What will Egypt eat if no one plants? Our people have grown rich through the labours of the slaves . . . and now there are no slaves."

In this Jannes spoke no more than truth, though pride would not suffer him to tell all the truth. Three short days had revealed the folly of a system based upon slavery. With the abundance of free labour the Egyptians had become indolent, dropping every form of labour which involved real toil. Tilling the soil and tending the cattle were only a part of the nation's work performed by the slaves. They were

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builders as well as brick-makers. It was they who wove the linen to clothe the people; who were butchers and bakers; the makers of pottery; craftsmen skilled in making jewelry; as well as domestic drudges.

The sudden flight of the slaves brought every part of the nation's life to an instant standstill. It was not simply the removal of a million people, a large proportion of the population. Nor was it the loss of those who did practically all the work, which paralysed Egypt. It was the loss of those who knew *how* to do it!

It was this sense of helplessness which drove out of their minds the recent tragedy and brought the people out into the streets again. Less than a week earlier they had shouted to Pharaoh to let the slaves go; now they were beginning to move in a body towards the palace to demand an instant pursuit. Pharaoh heard the guards challenge them, and a measure of relief came to him when he saw that he would not have to act against the will of his subjects.

And now he had reason to be thankful for the efficiency of the organization set up by Rameses when he enslaved the Beni-Israel. Goshen, like all Egypt, had been divided into districts, each under the administration of Egyptians, and sufficiently small in area for accurate observation of all that transpired. Relays of runners brought regular reports from each district to Tanis, so that Pharaoh could quickly learn of anything unusual taking place in any district.

The organization was so thorough that it had withstood even the shock of so many deaths among the Egyptians, and Merneptah was soon in possession of fairly recent news of the great flight. He already knew that the Beni-Israel had

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gathered in enormous numbers at Raamses, one of the great store-cities in Goshen, and that they had removed from there in a mass to Pithom. Now he learned that tens of thousands of slaves were streaming in from all over Goshen to join the mighty host moving slowly but steadily towards the border. The latest reports available told of their near approach to Etham, a strongly fortified town on the edge of the wilderness.

A hasty consultation with his military leaders sufficed to rouse the hopes of Pharaoh that the slaves might be compelled to return. His former sense of helplessness had resulted from the belief that once the Beni-Israel crossed the border they would be beyond pursuit. Now his eyes were opened by men trained to the moving of armies, who could therefore appreciate the colossal difficulties confronting Moses.

They pointed out to the now exultant Merneptah that no army can move more quickly than its slowest units, and that the problem of food and water supplies demands most careful forethought and provision. Moses had not been able to make any such adequate preparation. The Beni-Israel had gone out in haste, not at a time chosen by their leader, when his plans would have been worked out to the last detail. Moreover, as they truthfully emphasized, Moses was not leading an army, but an undisciplined mob. Encumbered with hundreds of thousands of women and children, and still further hindered by their enormous herds of cattle, the Beni-Israel could move only at a snail's pace.

Nor could they venture into the Etham wilderness, with its scanty pasturage and infrequent water-pools, without

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first securing adequate supplies of food, and, still more important, water for both a million people and all the cattle. That would involve organized transport . . . something the Beni-Israel did not possess. Hence an instant pursuit by a chariot force would enable the Egyptians to overtake the slaves before they had gone far into the wilderness, coming upon them when they would already be suffering real privations. They would be too weakened to resist, even if the spirit of resistance still survived.

Pharaoh listened with a leaping heart. He had now only one desire in life: to get the Beni-Israel back again into Goshen. It was his sole chance of averting the terrible vengeance of angry gods. His soul's salvation from a dreadful hell depended upon it. So he gave the order for his chariot force to begin the pursuit with a crisp incisiveness which was unusual and therefore all the more impressive.

There was a force of about six hundred chariots stationed in Tanis, each holding two or three men. These were all picked soldiers, not only highly trained in desert warfare but veterans of many campaigns. They were Egypt's frontiers' guards, seasoned by many a fight with Libyans on the west and fierce Philistines on the east. This force was immediately dispatched after the slaves, and in one of the chariots rode the High Priest Jannes.

Pharaoh had intended asking him to go, but the old man anticipated the request. He insisted on going, in spite of the hardships of a swift journey in a chariot devoid of springs or any method of softening the distressing jolting. Not even Pharaoh hated Moses as passionately as Jannes hated him. He believed that this sudden return of vigour was due to the

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gods' rejuvenating him for a special purpose. He never guessed the truth: that it was simply hatred, nursed through many long years, which now burned within him like a fire because its object seemed to be escaping him for ever.

The chariot force would be sufficient to bring the slaves to a halt, but not enough to drive back a million men if they were determined to resist. Pharaoh therefore waited a day longer in Tanis, mobilizing a strong force of horsemen and infantry. This would be augmented by the soldiers stationed in each of the districts as they marched through Goshen, reaching such numbers eventually that resistance by the slaves would be suicide. When these final arrangements were complete, Merneptah stepped up into his own war-chariot and led the way towards Etham.

Moses had experienced all the difficulties discussed by the Egyptian generals, and many they had not imagined. The three days from Raamses to Etham sprinkled his beard with white. They had been a nightmare and would have broken a weaker man for good. Scarcely a soul in all that vast multitude had ever known the meaning of free, unrestricted movement. They had always gone where they were told to go, with Egyptians watching them as they went. Within a few hours of the hasty flight from Raamses the heady wine of freedom began to intoxicate them. Such Egyptians as they saw fled from before them, and shouts of derisive merriment stirred the dust-cloud caused by the marching host as they watched the panic-stricken flight of brutal slave-drivers whose whips had so recently flayed them. For the sheer joy of using their unaccustomed liberty, thousands of the younger people broke away from the line of march and

raced among the fields, to feast upon the luscious vegetables they had grown in sorrow to feed their oppressors.

They would not believe there was need for haste, nor did the older men and women who plodded along the direct route. They were uplifted by a wave of emotional religious fervour. Jehovah had delivered them. He had slain the first-born of Egypt in His wrath. They were His people, going on to their promised land! Who could do anything against the chosen people of God? Again and again the march was held up while the undisciplined, disorganized mob broke up into impromptu camp-meetings. Scores of self-elected leaders rose up to pour out impassioned harangues to no less excited hearers, rehearsing the long tale of their sufferings, and going over in endless detail the series of terrible happenings by which the power of Egypt had been broken.

Children slipped away from their mothers as the women abandoned themselves with Oriental fervour to singing the praises of Jehovah, swaying rhythmically as they clapped their hands and stamped their feet to release their long-repressed emotions. When the emotional storms temporarily subsided and the women looked round for their children, it was to discover their loss. Dropping their loads, heedless of the inconvenience to others, they ran off to make frantic search for their little ones in that vast crowd.

It was in vain that Moses urged upon the Elders of Israel the need for haste. He spoke to men who were in transports of joy and wholly unable to understand his words. Aaron and Miriam, who should have been his ablest helpers, were now his worst enemies. Their long-tried faith had been vin-

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icated. The day of deliverance had actually come. So, more than any others, they gave themselves up to frenzied emotionalism.

Moses understood Pharaoh better than any living man. He had studied the man in all those drawn-out months of conflict and could read him like a book. He knew that Merneptah had been dazed by the loss of his son and that for the moment genuine grief had swamped both pride and hatred. But he knew how swiftly hatred can flare up again in a vicious nature. It would only be a matter of hours before Pharaoh would revert to his former self. As he had promised and recanted in the past, so he would do again. Pursuit was inevitable, and every hour was vital if the Beni-Israel were to achieve their freedom.

Again and again Moses ran back and broke up those hastily formed meetings of laughing, singing irresponsibles. His voice grew hoarse with shouting to make himself heard above the din, and even his vast strength began to give way under the incessant strain of rushing up and down the long, scattered lines. Ten miles a day was all he could achieve; less than half the distance he had planned.

By the time Etham was reached, the riotously happy mob had worked off much of its frenzy . . . and Moses was convinced of the utter impossibility of attempting the Etham wilderness. The Egyptian generals had thought of the need for water in that adventure. Moses scarcely considered that problem. It was eclipsed by much weightier considerations.

When the journey began, he had a fairly accurate idea of the military strength of the Beni-Israel. There were at least 500,000 men among them, and all of them had some

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kind of weapon. Many had brought with them the long knives they used in their work. Others had spears or bows, while a few had seized the swords of the Egyptians in that night when panic had so possessed their oppressors that they surrendered what was demanded. Crude, primitive, as was such an armament, it would have been sufficient in the hands of so large a number of men . . . if those men were resolute and disciplined. They would have rolled over opposition by sheer weight of numbers.

On the farther side of the wilderness were the savage Philistines and the equally fierce tribes of Canaanites. They would not willingly permit the entry into their land of so vast a host. Conflict was inevitable. Those three days of nightmare journeying had shown Moses that he was not leading an army prepared for war, but a rabble of unstable folk who would break and scatter at the first onslaught of disciplined fighters. The lack of order among the Beni-Israel was as effective a barrier to the conquest of Canaan as a ring of fortified posts along its border.

In his desperation he turned again, as always, to Jehovah for guidance. The answer came immediately . . . and as often happens in the ways of God with men, the answer seemed a counsel of madness. As clear as though spoken by an audible voice Moses heard the command of the God he served so utterly. He was not to attempt the wilderness crossing and contend with the Philistines, but to turn south and lead the people by the way of the Red Sea, lest with the coming of conflict the people should break and flee back to Egypt and slavery for ever.

When he gave the order to turn south, revolt immediately

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reared its ugly head. Aaron and Miriam came with the Elders of Israel and stormed against Moses for his folly. They pointed out, with apparently unanswerable logic, that this would be to court disaster. If it was true that Pharaoh would organize pursuit—and by now they were beginning to awake to that peril—this change of direction would be to play into the hands of Egypt. They would be cut off from all possibility of escape by the Red Sea on their flank.

Moses reasoned with them patiently, insisting that he was following the command of God and trying to make them see the necessity for avoiding conflict until something approaching discipline could be reached. He pointed out that the barrier of the Red Sea would have an advantage in their case, since it would prevent the Egyptians from attacking them on that flank. Again he urged the necessity for haste, for if they could only reach the range of mountains he knew so well which ran parallel with the sea for several miles, it would mean that the Egyptians could only attack from the rear, and in the narrow defiles a determined stand by the men of Israel would enable the rest to effect a crossing of the sea.

In the end he won his way, and the journey southwards was begun, but this time with no singing to lighten the way. Uneasy doubts were beginning to trouble the people. Their fears were not lessened by a return of the strange atmospheric conditions of that year of terrific electric storms. Before they had reached Etham, they had seen upon the distant horizon another of those weird dark clouds which had preceded the devastating hailstorm which had ruined the crops of the Egyptians.

Long black fingers of cloud had pushed slowly up into the

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sky, daily mounting higher until they resembled a gigantic column, appearing all the blacker because of the contrast of the vivid blue of the sky. At night its immense bulk was constantly broken up by electric discharges which did not come in thin streaks of dazzling lightning such as they knew. The interior of the great column of cloud seemed to dissolve, glowing with a strange incandescence, and lighting the earth beneath.

At the first appearance of the strange phenomenon that fear which the unusual in nature always arouses among primitive races sent the people hurrying to Moses. The pillar of cloud and fire was directly before them, seeming to bar their onward march. To their ingrained superstitions it seemed a sign that they should not proceed. Moses turned that incipient panic into even greater assurance in Jehovah by assuring them that this was indeed a sign, but from Him. Just as the sacred mountain in Sinai was always enveloped in cloud, a cloud to hide the glory of God, so he affirmed what he believed: that God was there in the cloud by day and in the strange lighting by night to guide His people on.

His faith was confirmed, and the opposition to his order to turn south ended, when the strange cloud slowly moved along the sky and once again appeared directly in the path they were taking. Living in a land of little rain, they knew nothing of the movements of cyclones. Believing in signs and portents, this was wholly convincing. So they went on with renewed confidence in both Jehovah and Moses.

News of the changed route of the slaves was swiftly relayed to Merneptah as he hurried by forced marches in their wake. He could not understand the reason for it, but exulted

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in the fact. The Beni-Israel were entangled in the land; shut in by the sea and desert on the east and hurrying down into the mountain range which would prevent their escape to the west. With what, to him, seemed utter folly, Moses was marching into an almost perfect trap. So he gave orders for the chariot force to keep in touch with the rearguard of the Beni-Israel, but to delay any open attack until he could arrive with his infantry to see the final humiliation of Moses as he was forced to surrender.

Though he was confident that in turning to the south he was following the will of Jehovah, Moses never ceased considering the problem of crossing the sea with his mixed multitude of people and cattle. And here the years spent in Midian proved for the first of many occasions their inestimable value: that they were indeed years of preparation for his present task. He had frequently visited the Red Sea shore from the Midian side and was familiar with every mile of its course. He remembered one place which very nearly fulfilled the need of the moment. The Sinai range ended close to the sea in a bold mountain known locally as Baal-zephon. On its northern side was a narrow pass, which could easily be defended if necessary, and at its base was a wide plain big enough for an encampment for even so great a host. More important, the water flowing down into the sea from the lakes and marshes was here at its narrowest and shallowest.

No rain had fallen in that area for months, for the great hailstorm had passed right over Sinai and Goshen. He had noticed at Etham that the water was unusually low, and it was just possible that the always shallow stretch between Baal-zephon and Migdol might prove to be fordable. With

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this in mind he urged the Beni-Israel to hasten, for the task of transporting children and cattle even through a shallow ford would occupy many hours.

When they reached the mountain range on the Egyptian side of the sea, Moses climbed a height and looked back. A moving cloud of dust to the north told him that his fears had been well grounded. Pharaoh's chariots were advancing rapidly. Much farther away he saw a second and bigger dust-cloud and guessed that this was caused by the main Egyptian army.

The news of the pursuit spread throughout the hosts of the Beni-Israel, and though they now travelled more swiftly than since leaving Raamses, Moses saw only too clearly the first signs of panic. The chariot force overtook them before Migdol was reached, and the hoarse yelling of the Egyptian soldiers helped still more to demoralize the slaves.

Anticipating an immediate attack, Moses sent a force of several thousand men to guard the rear, completely blocking the stretch of plain between Migdol and the sea. He placed this force in position himself, and from his rear lines he could distinguish the faces of the men in the chariots nearest to him, and immediately picked out the tall, thin form of the High Priest Jannes. His presence with the chariots told Moses that Egypt still had a healthy fear of the God of Israel. Jannes was there to inspire the Egyptians with faith in their own gods, for with primitive peoples battles are always as much between rival gods as between rival armies.

When the chariots made no attempt to charge upon the mass of the poorly armed Beni-Israel, Moses rightly concluded that they were under orders to await the coming of

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the main force under Pharaoh himself. That would give him a few brief hours to begin negotiating the ford, if the water was shallow enough. He therefore hurried through the mob of frightened slaves, listening to their frantic appeals to Jehovah to save them.

Before he could reach the sea, he was compelled to stop. The demoralization increased every second, and sullen faces and angry voices told that faith in Jehovah as well as faith in him was almost wholly gone. Some of the Elders pushed their way to him and cried angrily:

"Because there were no graves in Egypt have you taken us to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt thus with us, to bring us out of Egypt? Is not this the word we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?' for it were better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

Moses heard them without contempt. Their craven spirit and swift forgetfulness of all that had taken place did not move him to anger. A year in Goshen had helped him to understand his people and filled him with a passionate pity. He had seen that the curse of slavery had enfeebled the Egyptians and almost destroyed the manhood of the Beni-Israel. Ill usage had made of them frightened children, who needed encouragement instead of harsh words. His fine faith in God, and deep love for a nation spoiled by oppression, inspired him to cry aloud:

"Fear ye not; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which He will work for you this day! The Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever!"

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His confidence steadied all who heard his great ringing voice . . . and almost immediately there came what to them was yet another sign to confirm his magnificent faith. The great column of cloud which for three days had been before them now began to move in a circular path, as cyclones do. They watched it slowly moving round to the north, until its dark mass was between them and the Egyptian army. Its movement was the more impressive because there was no perceptible wind to account for it. The air was stagnant, too heavy for easy breathing, and a great silence had come upon sea and mountain.

It was broken by a sudden uproar among the Egyptians, which told of the arrival of the main army. But though they knew they were there, the Beni-Israel could not see them. The low-hanging black cloud had shut off the last rays of the setting sun, though the incessant lightning discharges within the storm-cloud made the camp of the Beni-Israel almost as light as day.

Moses reached the sea at last, and, thrusting his rod outwards, plunged it into the water. To his joy he found that the water was only a few inches deep, and running strongly to the sea.

Then suddenly the stagnant air gave way before a terrific blast of wind from the east, driving clouds of sand before it, and compelling the amazed Beni-Israel to crouch upon the ground. It passed, but a few minutes later a second and even stronger blast swept down upon them, roaring up the mountain gorges and shrieking on towards the great storm-cloud and the invisible army on its farther side.

Silence succeeded this second blast for a space, and the

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Beni-Israel looked at each other with awed and wondering eyes. Moses had bidden them stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, and lo! He came upon the wings of the whirlwind to their aid. From the extreme of panic they swung to the opposite of utter confidence, and were now ready to follow the commands of Moses when he spoke.

The brief stillness after the second wind ended in a strong, steady gale which howled and moaned above them for hour after hour. It carried with it millions of grains of sand from the desert beyond the sea, and the stinging particles made it almost impossible for men to face it. They lay upon the ground with their heads enveloped in their loose outer cloths, enduring the discomfort without murmuring because they believed that this was Jehovah's way of salvation.

At midnight the wind dropped as suddenly as it had arisen, and Moses hurried again to the edge of the sea, to cry aloud in praise as he saw before him a dry riverbed carpeted with sand from Sinai. At his cry the people rushed down to the shelving banks, and when they saw the way thus opened for their crossing they went momentarily mad with delight. Seizing those who were nearest to him, Moses thrust them by main strength into the now open passage and shouted to them to go forward.

The lead thus given was swiftly followed, and by the vivid light from the glowing, seething, white-hot centre of the storm-cloud the Beni-Israel began the strangest journey in the long history of mankind. All through the night they passed across in their tens of thousands, singing as they went dry-shod over what a few hours earlier had been a sheet of water. When the last of the women and children had crossed in safety, the cattle were driven over.

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Dawn broke as the last of the cattle trotted upon the further bank, lowing as they scented fresh water in a spring within the gorge. And now the cyclone which had been held stationary by the gale began to move again, completing its circular passage. By the faint light of early dawn the army of the Egyptians saw with amazement that the vast camp of the Beni-Israel was deserted, but they could hear the shouts of happy laughter and the confused murmur of a mighty host on the other side of the sea. Maddened at the thought that Moses was escaping him once more, Pharaoh shouted the order for the chariots and his mounted men to follow at once. In a few minutes there came the thunder of hooves and the ululating war-cry of Egypt as hundreds of chariots swept across the plain and plunged down the bank to cross that two-mile stretch of river-bed.

A million people and tens of thousands of cattle cannot cross a sandy waste without churning up its surface. The hooves of the cattle had penetrated through the loose sand and reached the moisture below, and as the wheels of the heavy chariots tore into the damp mixture of mud and sand the chariots began to tax the strength of the horses to the limit. The first mad rush was slowed up almost to a walk. Jannes stood in the foremost chariot, his thin face convulsed with the fury which had him in its grip, shrieking imprecations against Moses and prayers to his gods. In his lust to reach the man he hated so intensely he belaboured with his thin fist the broad back of the burly charioteer, striving to get more speed.

Struggling desperately, the chariot force reached a point half-way across the river-bed, with a hundred horsemen still nearer to the shore on which the now silent Beni-Israel

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waited with despair in their hearts. The main army of Egypt was moving rapidly across the plain, eager to reach the river and fall upon the slaves.

In the frenzy of fear and hate neither the Beni-Israel nor the Egyptians had watched the path of the cyclone. Passion blinded them to everything. The great black column had circled until it stood directly above the Red Sea, and the first warning of the grim tragedy to come was a deafening peal of thunder and a searing flash of lightning which paled the light of the new-born day. Then, as though that lightning flash had burst the cloud, from it descended an almost solid wall of water, falling right into the sea. Millions of tons of water fell in moments, and held by the river banks it came sweeping down upon the labouring chariots.

Pharaoh's army upon the bank saw it first, and a shout of terror rose from thousands of throats. The charioteers looked round and instantly realized their peril. With whips flaying the sides of their almost exhausted horses, and yelling frantically, they strove their utmost to win to safety. Those nearest the Beni-Israel tried to forge straight ahead. Those behind tried to turn and make their way back, and in doing so collided with each other, ripping off wheels and overturning chariots in scores. Jannes was flung out of his chariot and disappeared beneath the pounding hoofs, his thin body trampled into the mud beneath.

There was no escape. The contents of that cloud-burst bore down upon the Egyptians in a solid wall, which picked up the heavy chariots and tossed them aloft like straws, turned them over, and swept on in a resistless flood. One minute the river-bed was full of a shouting, struggling mass

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of men and horses; the next it was covered with a frothing, swirling mass of water . . . and the flower of Egypt's army had gone for ever, and Pharaoh's main army was cut off by an impassable barrier from the slaves they coveted.

Standing still in awed silence, the Beni-Israel had seen the salvation of the Lord. With a strong hand he had delivered them out of the hands of their oppressors. By the side of the raging sea, which every moment tossed up before their shining eyes a victim of that flood, they joined in a solemn song of praise. Across the flood they saw the main army turn and go back towards Egypt, and knew that the word of Moses was fulfilled: that they should see them again no more for ever.

Moses himself was not among that awed, silent multitude. With the coming of that wall of water which meant freedom for the Beni-Israel, he spoke to Aaron and led the way up to the heights of Baal-zephon, from which he could see the full extent of the disaster for Egypt.

No one noticed his departure. Absorbed in the drama before them, they had no eyes even for the great figure of the man whose sudden coming from Midian had resulted in their deliverance from slavery. All Israel forgot Moses in the hour of Egypt's defeat.

And in that utter forgetfulness of the man who had championed their cause the Beni-Israel justified their deliverance. In that great hour the soul of Israel was revealed. They did not turn to a man and overwhelm him with passionate gratitude, fawning upon him as a genius whose skill had overcome the might of Egypt.

Miriam, whose tragic life expressed most vividly the

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cruelty of the long years of oppression, now rose to meet the needs of the hour. At her word the women of Israel formed themselves into two long lines by the side of the tumbling sea, many of them hurriedly fetching their timbrels. Then Miriam began the first steps of the ritual dance in honour of Jehovah, and the women of Israel followed the slow movements which enable primitive minds to express surcharged emotions more adequately than words.

They were free, but it was not the glorious sense of liberty which possessed them. Freedom meant no more to them in that great hour than did Moses. The deep, passionate religious sense of the Beni-Israel which made them abler than any other people in the world to respond to the leading of God, moved them to worship Him instead of exalting the human means employed.

So, when at last Miriam broke into words, the rocks of the age-old hills behind them echoed and re-echoed the strains of an impromptu anthem bursting from a million voices singing their song of faith . . .

"Sing ye to the Lord, for *He* hath triumphed gloriously."